South Haven Tribune

$3

March 8, 2026

Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Captain Brian Montgomery, who was recently promoted after South Haven Area Emergency Services added a third shift, has worked at SHAES for 17 years.

A shift in response

Montgomery shares goals as promoted SHAES fire captain

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — For 30 years, the South Haven Area Emergency Services has grown and expanded.

One of the most recent expansions was adding a third shift and promoting Brian Montgomery to captain. Born and raised in South Haven, Montgomery has been a member of the department for 17 years.

Montgomery recently sat down with South Haven Tribune Editor Julie Newell to discuss his life and goals as the new captain.

When did you start working at the fire department?

(In) 2008. Right out of high school, graduated '07, and then went to the fire academy right after that and then started here – paid-on-call.

Did you always want to go into this career?

No. I had a friend who was on the department and was like, that seems kind of cool, so that's why I joined.

What has been your career journey up to this point?

I went to EMT school and from there went to medic school. After medic school, I finished that like early 2011, and then started here in June of 2011 full time.

What would you say is the most rewarding part of the job?

The people you work with, for sure.

What is the most difficult part of the job?

That's a tough one, because that's changed over time. Right now, the schedule. Like the season of life I'm in, with young kids and stuff, gone for 24 hours at a time. Yeah, Erica's running the household a lot, you know, because I'm gone for, realistically 26 hours at a time. So she might have two, three, four days in a row where she's got to take care of getting kids to school, she gets them home, she's doing all the baths, all the meals, everything. Then the next day, all over again. Because I might not be home in time to take the kids to school or I might have meetings or training or something here. The schedule right now is the toughest.

What kind of calls do you most often go out on?

Most often it's EMS calls. You know, that's the bulk of our runs. Lift assist, which we classify that as a fire call, not an EMS call. EMS is the most generic type of thing, uses the ambulance.

How do you feel about being promoted to captain?

It's exciting. It's a lot easier to get promoted than it is to do the job. Once you get the promotion, that's when, to me, the real work starts, because now all the things you said you would do and how you would act and what you would ... now you have to actually do that. You have to live that. It's a lot easier to say it than it is to do it.

What are the differences moving from your previous position into captain?

Probably one of the biggest differences is the responsibility of running the day, and knowing your people and understanding, because there's so much more than just running the day, as far as, like calls. People know what apparatus needs to go to what call. They know who needs to respond; that's a still alarm, that's a general alarm, they know that stuff. If they don't, then I haven't done my job teaching them appropriately how we respond. So, they shouldn't know all that stuff, but it's so much deeper than that because you need to know your people to see, you know, are they doing OK when they come in to shift, because the mental challenges of this job and stuff.

Are you mentally good for shift? Are there things at work that's affecting you? Are there things in your home life that could be affecting you when you come in? That's the biggest difference is trying to actually key in on that stuff better. You're doing it when you're not in a leadership position, because leadership doesn't require rank; everybody can be a leader – it doesn't matter. Now that you truly are in charge and responsible, make sure your people are good, all those little things, you know? I like to say sometimes you feel like a camp counselor – managing all the other things. The calls, people know that, it's the other stuff that you're managing.

What are your goals and aspirations as captain?

There's been a lot of changes in the last five years. There's been a lot of changes with SHAES and how we have to operate. The forced changes, like the way we've done things for 30 years doesn't quite work anymore because, outside factors that have changed how we kind of have to operate. I'd say probably three years is when we really felt it and there's been a lot of changes and things that we're doing to adapt to that.

Probably from a goal and standpoint; we're kind of moving from a small department to more of an intermediate-sized department and with that, there's a lot of growing pains and stuff. We just added a third shift. We used to have A shift, B shift, now we have C shift; we went to a little different type of schedule. We're two months into a really big shakeup; everybody's moved around, partners are all new (and) we're adding a lot of new people.

So, from a goal standpoint, I would say it's managing all the change. People don't like change so, how are we going to manage this change? But also, as we're continuing to grow and move forward, managing all that. I mean, that's a lot of stuff in there. There's a lot of stuff we're still working on and things to be decided.

Do you have any special skills, talents or hobbies that you enjoy?

Outside of work? What's that? Golf, for sure. Golfing with the boys, it's always the top one. That's pretty much it, though. Don't have that much free time, and that's not just because of SHAES, it's like kids and stuff too, family life. If I'm doing something fun, it's golf with the boys, probably. Euchre, we get together and play some euchre occasionally.

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South Haven approves part-time assessing position

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council has approved the creation of a new part-time assessing assistant position.

Finance Director Michele Argue said during Monday's meeting that the assessing department has had a high volume of work in the past several years due to the number of sales, building permits and land divisions/combinations occurring within the city each year.

"It takes us every bit of the year just to get us through the building permits and we're not able to go out and do as much as our assessing work as we can," Hosier said.

The downtown development authority director/assessing assistant position was created in 2024 to assist the assessing department with support in data entry work and assistance with field inspection of properties. The current position, held by Suzanne Brock, is limited in the amount of work that can be completed by anyone that is not a certified assessor to only data entry.

Argue said Brock also desires to have less hours and focus on just DDA responsibilities.

Public hearings

The city council held a public hearing and approved an ordinance to amend the Trailside/Everett Park Phase II PUD for the properties at 900 and 1070 Indiana Ave.

There are currently 24, two-family condominium units that are being built on the site and the amendment will add 32 additional units.

The city council also approved another amendment that will allow for city staff to craft a development agreement.

"This would allow city staff to work with the developer to address concerns that have been brought up by member (Mary) Hosley, as well as what we just heard," Hosier said.

The application will now return to the planning commission for final site plan review.

The city council held a second public hearing and approved an ordinance to amend the zoning map to rezone the properties at 706 and 712 Virginia Ave.

See COUNCIL, page A2

SH in the midst of short-term rental backlog

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven City Council met for a Committee of a Whole meeting to discuss the current backlog of short-term rental license applications.

The deadline for the license applications under the new short-term rental ordinance was set for May 1.

"The staff has been very cognizant that May 1 is approaching and yes, we are not getting the number of STRs out the door that we were hoping to," City Manager Kate Hosier said during Monday's council meeting. "We have sharpened our pencils and did come up with some language here that would at least stretch the time limit 'til the end of December, but at least it would get people through the door and get us moving along."

Planning and Zoning Administrator Kelly Getman-Dissette said the staff is only 20 percent done with the current applications and will not be able to get the rest done by the deadline.

"Some of the considerations that staff discusses was recognition of the fact that we don't want to simply extend licenses under the old Article 10, because we do want to have one uniform licensing regime," City Attorney Dave Eberle said. "We also recognize that despite the best efforts of our staff, we are in a backlog."

This proposed amendment would issue a conditional license for up to two years to the property owners if they were a registered short-term rental as of March 17, 2025, and they submitted all the necessary documents and fees.

"We thought that a conditional license would be an appropriate compromise in terms of allowing STR owners to continue to rent, understanding many of them already have reservations," Eberle said. "While working our way toward being able to review them fully in terms of an inspection and zoning compliance determination

See RENTALS, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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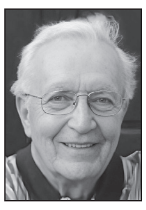
OBITUARIES

Howard Schultz



With gratitude for a long and well-lived life, we announce the passing of Howard E. Schultz, 91, of Douglas and most recently Holland, Mich. He passed away peacefully on Feb. 14, 2026.

Howard was born in 1935 at the Douglas Village Hospital, now the Kirby House, to Howard C. Schultz and Mae Schultz (Chase) of Douglas. A fifth-generation member of the Schultz family in the Saugatuck-Douglas area, his roots ran deep. His family were among the area's early settlers and he carried that legacy with pride throughout his life.

He graduated from Saugatuck High School in 1953 and earned a Mechanical Engineering degree from Indiana Technical College through a Ford Motor Company recruitment program. He was hired by Ford as a principal engineer, where he met Paula Martin of Lincoln Park on a company ski trip. They married in 1959 and raised three daughters.

Howard's 40-year career at Ford included travel to extreme weather testing facilities and a three-year assignment in Valencia, Venezuela. There, the family embraced international life and traveled throughout South America and the Caribbean.

Howard developed a lifelong love of hunting and fishing in the Allegan Woods with his father and uncles. A longtime member of the Fennville Rod and Gun Club, he served as treasurer and vice president and proudly supported the Youth Hunter Safety Program.

In retirement, Howard and Paula returned to western Michigan, settling in Glenn. He became active with the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society and alongside his daughter Sandra, helped preserve the documented history of the Schultz and Chase families. He was especially proud of Schultz Park in Douglas, named in honor of his father's contributions to the village.

Howard outlived Paula, his wife of 67 years, by less than four weeks. He is survived by his daughters, four grandchildren and extended family. He will be remembered for his kindness, steady presence and vivid hunting stories.

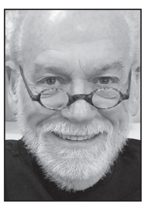
A graveside celebration of life will take place this summer at Douglas Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society at mysdhistory.org or the Fennville Rod and Gun Club Hunter Safety Program at www.fennvillerodandgunclub.com.

Arrangements are by Dykstra Funeral Homes-Saugatuck Chapel. To sign an on-line registry or leave a memory go to www.dykstra funeralhome.com.

Joseph Wilhelm

Dec. 17, 1946 – Feb. 25, 2026



Joseph "Jeff" Franklin Wilhelm, 79, of South Haven, Mich. died on Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2026.

Born on Dec. 17, 1946, in Noblesville, Ind., to Tony and Eleanor Wilhelm. Jeff lived a life marked by creativity, faith, humor and deep devotion to family.

Jeff is survived by wife of 56 years, Barbara; daughters Katie (Andre Van Schalkwyk) Wilhelm and Nell (Peter) Walker; and his cherished grandchildren Lila Walker, Maggie Walker, Max Walker, Sam Wilhelm-Van Schalkwyk and Tillie Wilhelm-Van Schalkwyk. He is also survived by his sister, Pamela Stewart; niece Molly (James) Murray; and nephew Nick (Sarah) Stewart.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Tony and Eleanor Wilhelm; Robert Simmermon; and his brother-in-law, Steve Stewart.

Jeff attended Noblesville High School and graduated from DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., where he was a member of the Delta Tau Delta fraternity. He served as Vice President at Grey Advertising in Los Angeles before pursuing a career as a television and screen writer. His credits include work on MASH, The Bob Newhart Show, Hunter and Eight Is Enough, among others.

Later in life, Jeff followed a calling to ministry and attended Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., where he earned his Master of Divinity. At the age of 58, he was ordained as an Episcopal priest. He faithfully served at St. Stephen's in Beaumont, Calif., and St. Andrew's in Ojai, Calif.

Jeff will be remembered for his kindness, wicked sense of humor, generosity and how he adored his loved ones.

A memorial service for Jeff will be held at 3 p.m. on Saturday, March 7, 2026 at The Episcopal Church of The Epiphany, 410 Erie St. South Haven, Michigan 49090. Reverend John Wakefield will officiate.

Donations to honor Jeff may be made to: The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, We Care South Haven, A food bank of your choice or call a friend and tell them you love them.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to www.starks familyfuneralhomes.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

COUNCIL

From page A1

The city council also approved the preliminary site plan that has a site condominium with six single-family residential lots.

Other items

City council approved an amendment that allows for the city to enter into payment in lieu of taxes agreements by resolution. The agreement is a requirement for the application for funding housing projects – such as the Overton project – from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

"Our previous ordinance would spell all this out in an ordinance that makes it a little hard to wield it," City Manager Kate Hosier said. "So, that's why with Attorney (Dave) Eberly's suggestion we're going to, if council approved this amendment tonight, then we would draft resolution with a PILOT agreement attached."

This agreement would mean the city will handle all payment in lieu of taxes, not just for a specific project.

The city council introduced an ordinance to amend the code of ordinances to allow a single person to hold multiple offices.

This ordinance stems from having a limited number of individuals available in serving on boards and commissions.

"There is a prevision in our code of ordinances that's a carry over of a previous version of a Michigan Planning Act that prohibited planning commissioners from holding other office," Hosier said. "We already know that's not been working out; we have at least one planning commissioner who is on two boards."

City council approved three special events including:

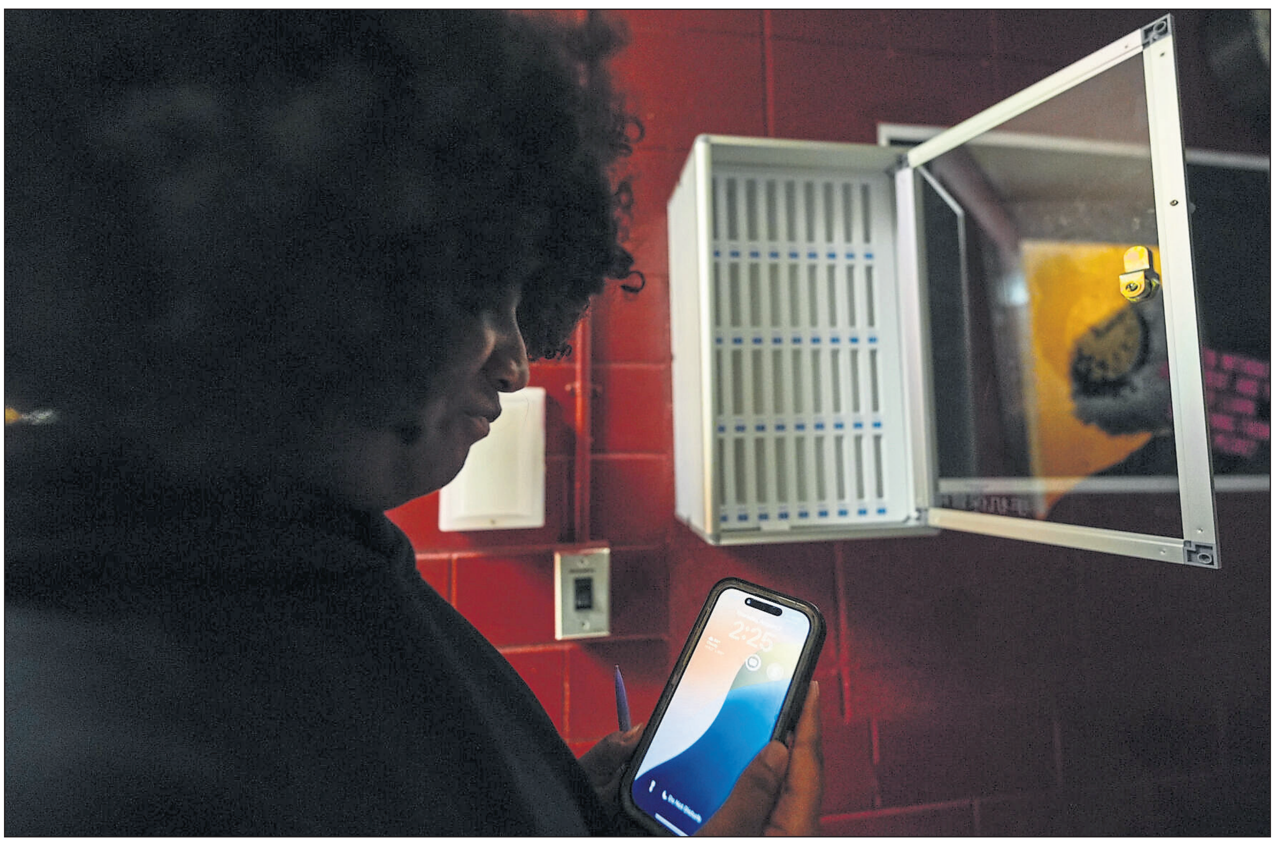
■ Juneteenth Celebration to be held from 2-9 p.m. on June 20 in Elkenburg Park.

■ South Haven Festival of Cars/Kruisin' for Kylie to be held from 5:30 a.m. to 4 p.m on June 6 on Phoenix, Center, Eagle and Water streets.

Contact: jnewell@southhaven tribune.com, 269-637-1104

Navigating distressing news and finding coping mechanisms

By SARA CLINE
Associated Press



Mike Stewart / AP

A student views her cell phone at Ronald McNair Sr. High School, Aug. 7, in Atlanta.

BATON ROUGE, La. — As people awoke to headlines over the weekend about deadly U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran and potential of widening conflict, alerts, social media and conversations at the dining room table were consumed by the news.

While medical experts say it is normal for people to experience stress and anxiety – or feeling that the world descended into chaos overnight – it is important to find coping mechanisms and ways to responsibly take in the news in order to protect one's mental health.

"Fear, sadness, confusion... these are very normal reactions to very extreme circumstances," Michael S. Ziffra, a Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine professor and psychiatrist, told The Associated Press. "People shouldn't feel guilty, or they shouldn't feel like it's wrong to feel anxiety. It's a very normal human response. The key is to know how to manage it."

Normal feelings

Since 2020 – a year marked by the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, social and political unrest and weather-related disasters – Ziffra said he has "absolutely, without question" seen an uptick in patients bringing up increased anxiety provoked by current news.

Some patients vent, some talk about obsessively scrolling on social media and others discuss feeling helpless and frustrated.

But, psychiatrists say those feelings are absolutely normal and to be expected. In fact, sometimes they can result in something positive – from getting involved in advocacy, joining a social or political organization or just contacting lawmakers.

Other's may seek to learn more about what is going on. But like with most things in life, moderation is important.

"The problem is, for a lot of people, they just kind of wallow in it. They ruminate and obsess and just sort of stew in it," Ziffra said.

Consuming distressing news

In today's world, people are just a click away from learning about practically anything they want – sometimes even less, with a predetermined algorithm on social media pushing posts or alerts on their phone interrupting their day. People have access to 24/7 news cycles and phone cameras can capture, and disseminate, videos and images of disasters within seconds.

For years, Dana Rose Garfin, a psychologist and professor at University of California, Los Angeles, has been studying "cascading collective traumas" and researched how the media's continuous coverage of COVID increased anxiety. Garfin said the reality is that people don't consume the news how they used to. Instead of reading a newspaper or flipping on the evening news once a day, people are "much more exposed" to current events.

And as people learn about disasters or breaking news, they become distressed.

"In terms of any kind of crisis, people turn to the media for information. And that's a very logical, rational and helpful reaction," Garfin said.

"But, what we've seen in our research is there's this sort of reciprocal effect. An event happens, people learn about it, they turn to the media to learn more about it, and they're really distressed," Garfin said, adding that what occurs next is a cycle that people have a hard time removing themselves from. "It sort of activates these processes where then they're both more distressed and want to know more about this event because they're distressed."

Responsibly consuming media

While experts said they understand people's need to continue to seek out news, there is a way to do it responsibly without becoming overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. Their top suggestion was to eliminate or cut down on social media and obsessive "doomscrolling."

"I don't immerse myself in social media, and that's a very conscious decision on my part to protect my own mental, and physical, health," said Roxane Cohen Silver, a psychologist at the University of California, Irvine, and who co-authored the study with Garfin. She specifically raised concerns about graphic images and video that quickly circulate on social media that can cause distress and long-term anxiety when seen repeatedly.

"I think that one can stay informed without immersing oneself in graphic images," she said.

Garfin suggested finding more "enjoyable" ways to consume news, such as an informative news article, listening to a podcast or watching a news segment. "That's different than this kind of letting the algorithm suck you in for eternity in a mindless fashion."

Experts also urged people to set timers, when scrolling on their phone. Both iPhones and Android devices have controls to help regulate screen time.

Ziffra suggested choosing neutral news sources. "Try to avoid things where it's very partisan and where there's going to be a lot of inflammatory content, because that's going to likely exacerbate your anxiety and make you feel anxious, angry, scared."

Identifying coping mechanisms

Even if a worrisome news event is happening thousands of miles away, and even if it doesn't directly impact a person reading about it, it can still cause intense stress and anxiety. For that reason, medical experts urge people to identify other ways to cope.

"People have a lot of inherent knowledge of what helps them... and things that they find comfort in, which is different for everybody," Garfin said.

From breathing exercises, going for a walk, leaning into hobbies, getting together with friends, talking to a therapist, creative pursuits and self care, psychiatrists say it is important to redirect your attention in other ways.

"Things that are going to get your mind off of all of the obsessing and worrying and really putting your thoughts on something more positive," Ziffra said.

RENTALS

From page A1

for them to be issued an ultimate license."

Getman-Dissette said they are not trying to skirt the process.

"It is an effort to ensure that we are still working through the zoning compliance determination process, but to make sure that folks are able to follow through on their rental obligations for the summer as well," Getman-Dissette said.

The conditional license would be a way for the short-term rental owners to continue renting while also giving the staff members time to finish the applications and do the necessary inspections before a regular license is issued.

"We've got well over 500 property owners who have applied, who have done the right thing, followed our advice and we don't want to punish people for doing what we asked," Getman-Dissette said.

After the council discussed other concerns related to the ordinance and the licensing process, members proposed introducing this amendment in the regular city council meeting that took place Monday night.

Council Member Mary Hosley expressed her concerns about moving the item to the regular meeting.

"I caution these types of agendas to bring things forward that will then get set on the exact same night meeting, because people are not getting the type of notice that they should be entitled to when this affects their rights," Hosley said.

The council voted to have the amendment be introduced in the regular city council meeting.

"I think because of the urgency that we have, it's not going to be passed tonight," Council Member Tom Capps said. "I think most people have had adequate time to know at least that we were going to discuss it. They had the opportunity to be here tonight and they'll have another opportunity tonight, as well as in the future when it comes up for a vote."

During the regular city council meeting, the discussion continued on the amendment.

Eberle said if the short-term rental did not meet the inspection or the zoning compliance determination, the conditional license would be terminated.

"We don't want to hurt folks, whether it's the city, STR owners or visitors by not being able to process things in a timely fashion that have been submitted on time," City Council Member Dave Flack said. "Taking this action will give us some time to bring in new applications and new licenses that will be spread out, versus all at one time and I think from a workload standpoint that's critical going forward."

The city council voted to introduce the amendment and it will be brought back for a second reading at a later date.

The city council plans to hold regular Committee of the Whole meetings once a month at the first of every month.

Contact: jnewell@southhaven tribune.com, 269-637-1104

Al-Van Humane Society
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Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Sonar!

Meet Sonar, one of our Final 7! At almost 2-years-old, Sonar is a bundle of brains and bounce. He loves to run and let loose in the yard, showing off his joyful zoomies and athletic spirit. He thrives with space to move and people who are ready to keep up with him. He's not just speed, though. Sonar already knows sit, down, and paw, and he's eager to keep learning. With a little consistency, he's going to shine. Sonar does well with other dogs and would happily have a canine friend to romp around with. He'd be a wonderful match for an active home that's ready for both fun and structure. Sonar is neutered, microchipped, vaccinated, and heartworm negative. If you're ready to help us empty a kennel and make room for the next dog in need, Sonar is ready to make waves in your life.

To submit an adoption survey, visit al-van.org/adopt.

Culver's Share Night

Join Al-Van next Tuesday from 5–8 PM at Culver's! A portion of all proceeds during that time will be donated to support the animals at Al-Van Humane Society. Grab a bite, treat yourself, and help our pets at the same time!

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST

Purina Dry Kitten food, Kitten Milk Replacer (KMR)

Visit us online at www.southhaventribune.net

Market One's Zach Morris joins Sturgis Bank

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Sturgis Bank recently announced that Zach Morris has joined the bank as assistant vice president, business development for Van Buren County.

According to a news release, Morris most recently served as executive director of Market One, which has principal responsibilities for economic and community development throughout Cass and Van Buren counties.

MORRIS

"Under his leadership the organization had an economic impact of $2.26 million and helped businesses create 1,300 jobs," the release stated.

Morris has over twenty years of experience helping businesses in Michigan grow and thrive.

"We are thrilled that Zach has joined the Sturgis Bank team," Senior Vice President and Community President for Van Buren County Stephanie Timmer said in the release. "We've been serving clients in Van Buren County for over 25 years and continue to grow throughout the region. Zach will be instrumental in continuing our expansion."

Morris holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Professional Studies from Davenport University and is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute. He also earned his Certified Economic Development Finance Professional credential through Grow America.

"I'm excited for this opportunity," Morris said in the release. "In my previous role, I worked closely with the team at Sturgis Bank and witnessed firsthand the expertise, integrity and dedication they demonstrate in serving their clients each day. Joining the team feels like a natural progression, aligning my experience with a bank that is firmly committed to strengthening the communities it serves."

Morris currently serves as treasurer of the Michigan Economic Development Association, chairman of the Community Board of Directors for Beacon Dowagiac Hospital and is a board member of the County Brownfield and Land Bank Authorities.

Photos provided

The Friends Good Will is a traditional tall ship and a replica of an 1810 merchant vessel that once navigated the Great Lakes.

Volunteers wanted for 2026 sailing season in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The Michigan Maritime Museum is calling on aspiring sailors and history enthusiasts to join the volunteer crew of Friends Good Will for the 2026 sailing season.

According to a news release, volunteers will take part in hands-on sailing experiences, learning seamanship skills, sail handling, setting sails, an introduction to sailing a tall ship and sharing the rich maritime heritage of the region with museum guests, students and fellow sailors.

"This is your chance to step back in time and crew a traditional tall ship, a replica of an 1810 merchant vessel that once navigated the Great Lakes," the release stated.

Sailing experience is not required. Volunteers will train through the museum's Basic Seamanship Training program, where they'll gain the skills needed to crew the ship.

The volunteer crew of the Michigan Maritime Museum's tall ship, The Friends Good Will, embark on four sailing excursions daily, seven days a week during the summer.

Training dates are set for April 18 and 19 and May 16 and 17, with both classroom and on-water instruction. New crew members will continue to learn throughout the summer, sailing alongside seasoned volunteers and staff.

"The more you sail, the more you learn," Maritime Museum Fleet Captain Bob Harnish said in the release. "This is an incredible opportunity to experience sailing a traditionally rigged ship while keeping Michigan's maritime history alive."

With up to four sailing excursions daily, seven days a week, volunteers will have plenty of opportunities to put their new skills to the test.

Requirements include:

■ Must be at least 18 years of age.

■ Must complete all training sessions.

■ Free to participate.

"If you've ever dreamed of hoisting the sails and feeling the wind in your face, now's your chance," the release stated.

To sign up, email captain@mimaritime.org or call 269-637-8078 ext. 105.

"Come aboard, learn the ropes and set sail on history," the release stated.

Our Town Players to host auditions in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Our Town Players is holding auditions for the production of "The Mad Tea Party" by Brian D. Taylor.

According to a news release, the auditions will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. on March 19 and 20 at the South Haven Center for the Arts, 600 Phoenix St., South Haven, Mich.

"Drawn from Lewis Carroll's 'Wonderland' characters, this original story has the same wit and whimsy as the classic," the release stated.

It is being produced courtesy of Pioneer Drama Service.

"The Mad Hatter, Dormouse and March Hare meet for a tea party to honor Time, who has forgiven the Hatter and set time right once again," the release stated. "When the Jabberwock comes and wreaks havoc, the tea party guests – including the Caterpillar, the Duchess, the Frog Footman and Tweedledee and Tweedledum – decide that something must be done."

The audition is open to actors ages 13 and older. The cast is up to 15 actors, some with multiple parts.

"The Mad Tea Party" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. on May 1 and 2 at Listiak Auditorium, 600 Elkenburg St. South Haven.

For more information, contact info@ourtownplayers.org or on Facebook and Instagram.

Surf Internet construction to resume in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Surf Internet construction will continue in the southwest portion of South Haven in March along with citywide restoration and service installations.

According to a news release, construction will be contained within the road right-of-way for this project.

"At times, pedestrian traffic may be temporarily impeded due to utility spotting," the release stated. "Road traffic should be minimally impacted."

Restoration is expected to occur in tandem with construction, weather pending. New construction work will occur between Water Street and southern city limits from Monroe Boulevard to Le Grange Street.

Construction for the planned build is anticipated to be completed this year.

Private communities may reach out to Michael Gozelinchick with Surf Internet at 315-877-8471 or via email at mgozelinchick@surfinternet.com to get service in areas not yet covered.

For more information on work areas and construction updates from Surf Internet, go to surfinternet.com/construction/michigan/south-haven.

For questions or concerns regarding the construction, contact Bella Haberski at 269-637-0776 or via email at bhaberski@southhavenmi.gov.

Michigan group claims 750,000 signatures for proof of citizenship proposal

By BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — A Michigan ballot committee said Wednesday that it collected more than 750,000 signatures in support of an effort to put a proposal before voters that would require individuals to provide proof of citizenship and photo ID in order to vote.

Americans for Citizen Voting planned to turn in its petition signatures Wednesday afternoon to the state Bureau of Elections and expects it has enough valid signatures to appear on the November ballot.

"When noncitizens vote and are allowed to vote, it divides us, it cheapens citizenship and creates distrust in our elections," said Paul Jacob, chairman of Americans for Citizen Voting, during a Wednesday press conference in Lansing.

In the coming months, the Bureau of Elections will review the group's signatures to ensure volunteers collected the minimum 446,198 valid signatures required for a constitutional amendment to qualify for a spot on the Nov. 3 ballot.

If the group clears that threshold, it would be considered Proposal 2, behind a question posed every 16 years regarding whether the state should hold a constitutional convention to revise the state constitution. Several other ballot initiatives are currently collecting signatures from voters across the state.

Samantha May, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Bureau of Elections, said the bureau was unlikely to begin reviews of signatures for Michigan ballot initiatives until after it had completed reviews of various candidate filings. The deadline for certification of those candidate filings is not until May.

"Once those are complete, (Bureau of Elections) will review the initiatives and constitutional amendments," May said.

Voters Not Politicians, a voting advocacy group that's been active in Michigan election issues since it successfully overhauled Michigan's redistricting process in 2018, is one of the chief opponents of the effort.

Melinda Billingsley, communications director for the group, argued the extra paperwork required under the amendment could be a burden to registered and non-registered voters alike and serve as a barrier to voting for more than 700,000 voters without easy access to the documents needed to verify citizenship.

"The extra bureaucracy, the extra paperwork and red tape that will come into play if this passes really goes against the heart of the constitution and the changes voters have supported over the past several years," Billingsley said of ballot initiatives seeking to improve voter access over the past several years.

Billingsley promised paid and grassroots opposition to the ballot campaign in the coming months.

"Election protection is absolutely going to be the focus of Voters Not Politicians from now until November, and that includes fighting this ballot initiative," she said.

State Rep. Ann Bollin, a Brighton Township Republican and former clerk, rejected the arguments against the proposal as fear-mongering and maintained confidence that voters would not be swayed by them.

"These are not high thresholds to meet," Bollin said. "The concern should not be, 'How do we do this?' It should be, 'What happens if we don't?'"

At the end of 2025, Americans for Citizen Voting reported raising a cumulative $6.46 million. About $6 million of that came from Restoration of America, a Florida-based conservative advocacy nonprofit, and about $420,000 came from the Liberty Initiative Fund, a Virginia-based nonprofit, according to campaign finance filings.

Currently, under state and federal law, all voters must be U.S. citizens. Voters usually prove as much when they sign an affidavit at the time of registration attesting they are citizens.

But, in recent years, groups have been calling for more checks on that process, including requiring the Secretary of State to verify citizenship before completing registration.

Those calls heightened in the 2024 presidential election when a Chinese national enrolled at the University of Michigan illegally voted in the presidential election. A subsequent review by the Michigan Secretary of State's office identified 15 non-citizens who voted in the November 2024 presidential election.

In additional to the constitutional amendment being proposed by Americans for Citizens Voting, one other ballot proposal attempting to require the same proof of citizenship was prepared but does not appear to have been circulated. And Republican lawmakers have attempted to require similar proofs via resolutions and legislation.

The ballot initiative advanced by Americans for Citizens Voting would amend the constitution to require the Secretary of State to verify the citizenship of all registered voters, document it and remove non-citizens, if found, from the registered voter file. The language also would prohibit clerks from counting ballots from voters whose citizenship has not been verified unless those voters show records documenting their citizenship within six days of an election.

Individuals could verify their citizenship by showing a passport, birth certificate or other documents.

The constitutional amendment would require photo ID to vote and eliminate the option for a voter to sign an affidavit attesting to their identity in place of a photo ID. The amendment would establish a state-funded hardship program that would be available to those unable to pay for a photo ID.

Violations of the amendment would be subject to a $1,000 fine or up to five years in prison.

South Haven Tribune

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0900 LEGALS

Notice - 2026 Geneva Township Board of Review will meet: Monday, March 9, 2026 9am to 3pm; Thursday, March 12, 20266 pm to 9 pm, Saturday March 14, 9am to Noon. At the Geneva Township Hall, 62127 CR 380, Bangor Appeals by letter or agent to Geneva Township Supervisor, Nancy Ann Whaley, 63133 16th Avenue, Bangor, MI 49013.. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids/services call 269-427-7607

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
VAN BUREN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
26-1017-DE

Estate of Juan Manuel Mendez
Date of birth: 6/14/1996

TO ALL CREDITORS:

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Juan Manuel Mendez, died 9/28/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Jose Luis Mendez, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 220, Paw Paw, MI 49079 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Attorney Name:
Ivan Darling, P83871
2184 Commons Parkway
Okemos, MI 48864
616-295-0274

Date: 2/27/2026

Personal Representative:
Jose Luis Mendez
6206 Westlake Circle
Van Buren Township, MI 48111
269-369-1803

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Notice of Public Hearing
Monday, March 16th, 2026, at 7:00 PM
MDNRTF Grant Application for Casco Township
Nature Preserve Beach Access

Casco Township will hold a public hearing to provide an opportunity for the public to comment regarding an anticipated grant application to the MDNRTF for the purpose of beach access at the Casco Nature Preserve, located at 766 Blue Star Hwy, South Haven, MI. The Board plans to review proposed options brought forth by Edgewater Resources.

This Public Hearing will be held at its regularly scheduled Township Board Meeting at 7:00 PM at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave., South Haven, MI 49090. The public is welcome to attend and share comments in person, or they can be submitted in writing to the clerk by email at clerk@cascotownship.org.

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ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS
South Haven Public Schools
Baseline Middle School Parking Lot Improvements

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Milling and replacement of the existing parking lot at Baseline Middle School and the drive that connects to Bluestar Highway as well as other parking lot improvements and new light poles.

Note: ALL WORK TO BE PERFORMED IN THE SUMMER OF 2026. This is NOT a prevailing wages project.

BID PROPOSAL
Sealed bids, in triplicate, for the Baseline Middle School Renovations will be received at **South Haven Public Schools Administration Building located at 554 Green Street, South Haven MI 49090 until March 19, 2026, at 2:00 pm local time**, or delivered to GDK Construction, 12 W. 8th Street, Ste #250, Holland, MI 49423 on **March 19, 2026, until 12:30 pm** local time. Bids received after this time will neither be considered nor accepted. **The bid opening will be a public opening at 2:00 pm located in the basement conference room at the South Haven Administration Building located at 554 Green St, South Haven, MI 49090.**

All proposals received by the time and date stated above will be opened and read publicly.

In accordance with Section 1267 of the Revised School Code each bid must be accompanied by a sworn and notarized Familiar Disclosure Statement completed by the bidder disclosing any familiar relationships between the Owner or any employee of the Bidder and any member of the District's Board of Education or the Superintendent of the District.

SITE INSPECTION
There will NOT be a site pre-bid meeting. Bidders are encouraged to review the existing conditions outside of regular school hours of 7:30 – 3:30.

BID DOCUMENTS
The Bidding Documents may be viewed via GDK Construction's Datto Workplace site at https://gdk.workplace.datto.com/filelink/6b471-32be6f10-210d10dd82-2 or at Grand Rapids Builders Exchange. Bidding Documents will be available after **March 3**. Please note that contractors are responsible to review information on all drawings and specifications.

Please notify GDK of your intent to bid or not bid as soon as possible. This ensures you receive all current bidding documentation. Please email Lisa Knoll at lknoll@gdkconstruction.com.

BIDDER QUALIFICATIONS
Bidders submitting a Bid for this Project shall have qualifications as follows: a. shall be a reputable, recognized organization, with at least five (5) years successful experience on work of this type and scope of this project; b. shall have a license where required by public authorities having jurisdiction; c. shall have ample financial resources for work of this magnitude.

BID SECURITY – PERFORMANCE BONDS
Each bid shall be accompanied by good and sufficient bid security or bid bond in an amount not less than 5% of the Bid amount and shall secure the Owner from loss or damage by reason of the withdrawal of the Bid by a Bidder or by failure of the successful Bidder to enter into a Contract with the Owner if his Bid is accepted by the Owner.

The successful Bidder will be required to secure Performance, Labor and Material bonds for all contracts exceeding $50,000 from a surety company having a rating of A- or better, for the full amount of the Contract.

Covert Township Regular Board Meeting held February 10, 2026, at 6:00pm Covert Township Hall
73943 E. Lake St.
Covert, MI 49043

Call to order/Pledge of Allegiance
Roll call: Rose, Pritchard, Rendell, Cook, Taylor
Commissioner updates: VBC Road Commission
Public Comment: B. Norman, M. Bennett

Motions approved:
*the agenda as presented with an addition
*the consent agenda
*estimate from C-Comm of Kalamazoo to install radios on the new fire engine
* estimate from MacQueen to purchase gas detectors for the Fire Department
* the services contract with Vector Solutions
* quote #QUO-004171 from Technimount System LLC
* sending four fire fighters to the FDIC International Conference
* Section 15.14 of the Covert Police Department Policies Manual regarding the use of Tasers *
* emergency expenditure of a Sharp All-in-One Printer for the Police Department
* increasing the Senior Chore Program budget to $40,000 for the 25/26 fiscal year
* appointing Ben Pearce to the Zoning Board of Appeals
* paying invoice #1061 to Van Buren County
* authorizing Supervisor Cook to sign Grant Agreement PDAP-2026-CT-01, between Michigan Infrastructure Office Technical Assistance Center and Covert Township

Public Comment: A. McNair, C. Lewis, G. Newell, T. Bury, M. Bennett, B. Norman, B. Rose
Adjourned at 7:35pm

Next Regular Township Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 6:00 PM at the Covert Township Hall, 73943 Lake Street.

Respectfully submitted by Wednesday Pritchard, Covert Township Clerk

Covert Township Regular Board Meeting held January 13, 2026 at 6:00pm Covert Township Hall
73943 E. Lake St.
Covert, MI 49043

Call to order/Pledge of Allegiance
Roll call: Rose, Pritchard, Rendell, Cook, Taylor
Commissioner updates: VBC Road Commission, VBC Board of Commissioners, Allison Fuhrman rep. Joey Andrews
Public Comment: B. Norman, M. Bennett

Motions approved:
* the Consent Agenda
* the 2025/2026 budget amendments to various departments
* purchasing new American Heart Association training materials
* quote Q-1D4-791-4F26 from Plummer's Environmental Services, Inc
* designating the following dates to hold Covert Township's annual events: Memorial Day Parade – Monday, May 25, 2026; Trick or Treat – Saturday, October 31, 2026; Holiday Lighting Ceremony – Saturday, November 28, 2026
* designating the following dates to be Free Transfer Station Days in 2026: May 15, 16, May 22, 23, July 10, 11, July 17, 18, October 9, 10 and October 16, 17
* adopting the 2026 Poverty Exemption Income Guidelines and Asset Test Resolution with an increase to 5%
* board members to attend the MTA Annual Conference
*rescinding the previous related motion and transferring funds from the Police Department to the General Fund to reimburse costs and revenues incurred related to the Police Power Ordinance Enforcement in the 25-26 Fiscal Year to date
* entering into closed session to consult with the township attorney
* the NCG litigation and settlement strategy as recommended by counsel and authorizes counsel to take action consistent with that litigation strategy.
* entering into closed session to consult with the township attorney regarding trial or settlement strategy
* Covert Township to take action on next steps regarding the pending M-140 Auto litigation

Public Comment: B. Norman

Adjourned at 8:36pm

Next Regular Township Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 10, 2026, at 6:00 PM at the Covert Township Hall, 73943 Lake Street.

Respectfully submitted by Wednesday Pritchard, Covert Township Cler

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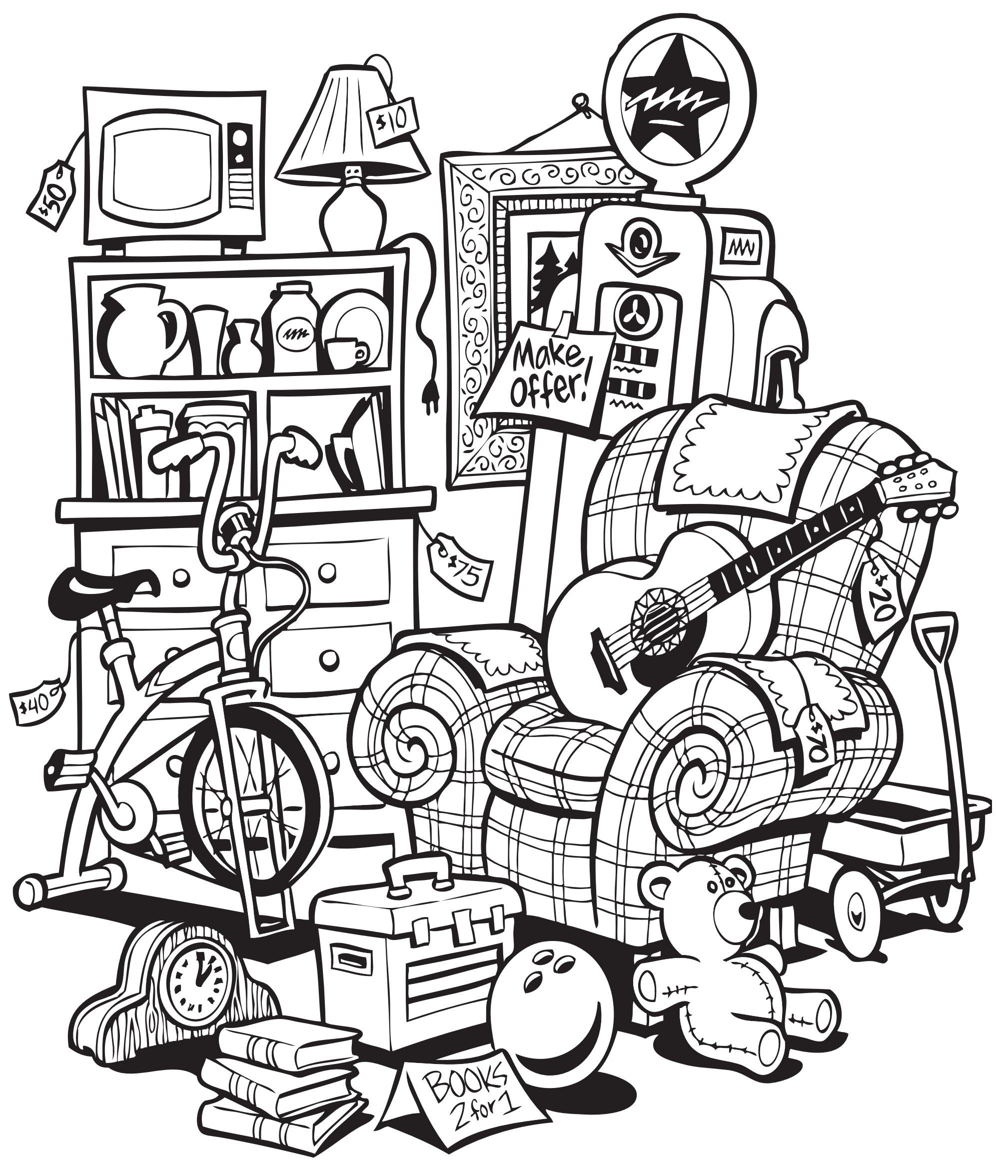


Photo provided

South Haven High School will present a jukebox musical for their fall production entitled "The Olympians."

South Haven High School presents 'The Olympians' musical

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven High School presents their fall production of "The Olympians," a new jukebox musical from Cara Reichel.

According to a news release, the production will take place at 7 p.m. on March 13 and 14 and at 2 p.m. on March 15.

"Three Greek goddesses, Athena, Aphrodite and Artemis, engage in a bet about how to best advance women's place in the world," the release stated. "They make a wager to determine which is the most powerful tool: a top-notch mind, a loving heart, or a fighting spirit?

Each goddess chooses one mortal girl, plucked from obscurity and sets each of the three girls on a quest to prove their point.

"When the male gods catch wind of the mortals' plans, they use their powers to make the quests much more treacherous than the goddesses intended," the release stated. "The mortals and the goddesses must decide how best to take on the challenges of the quest and of the plight of women in the world!"

The production features an eclectic score of hits from Miley Cyrus, Kelly Clarkson, Blondie, The Chicks and Pat Benatar.

"This tale of Ancient Greece has never felt more contemporary," the release stated.

Tickets are general admission and cost $10 for adults and $5 for South Haven Public School students and senior citizens.

Tickets are available online at shpsmusicandtheater.ludus.com/200520343 as well as at the door prior to each production.

"With over 30 students in the cast, crew and pit, you are bound to see some familiar faces," the release stated.

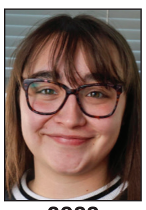
Lake Michigan College student to serve on state advisory task force

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College political science student Emma Goos of St. Joseph has been named to the nonpartisan Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force by the Michigan Department of State.

According to a news release, she will serve in this capacity through the end of 2026.

The task force, which is student-run with support from the Secretary of State's office, brings together students from universities and community colleges across Michigan who are passionate about civic engagement. They will serve as liaisons between the Secretary of State's office, school administrators, and their student body to ensure that the voices of young people are heard in the election process.



GOOS

Goos is among 23 college and university students in Michigan selected to serve on the committee from among nearly 100 applicants. The selection process included team interviews with representatives from the Secretary of State's office and a 10-minute elevator pitch on proposed strategies to increase voter engagement.

As one of only five community college representatives on the task force, Goos will focus on addressing the unique challenges faced by commuter students and on ensuring that community colleges are equally represented in statewide civic engagement efforts.

"I want to help people my own age, and people of any age, see why being involved in the election process matters and how all levels of government directly affect their lives," Goos said in the release. "By being on this task force, I hope my work with other college students will help take the veil off of how voting and elections work. I feel that if more people understand the process, more people will participate."

LMC political science instructor Tiffany Bohm encouraged Goos to apply for the task force. Goos credits her LMC education and Bohm's support with providing the foundation and confidence needed to pursue this opportunity.

"I am incredibly proud of Emma for stepping into this leadership role," Bohm said in the release. "Civic engagement is not just something we study in political science, it's something we practice. Emma is exactly the kind of thoughtful, community-minded leader we need."

The non-partisan initiative is a partnership between the Michigan Department of State and Campus Vote Project, a project of the Fair Elections Center, a national, nonpartisan voting rights organization.

Members work on initiatives including designing "I Voted" stickers for the 2026 midterm elections and developing campus-specific programming to increase voter accessibility and participation.

Following her spring semester at LMC, Goos plans to transfer to Michigan State University in the fall to complete her bachelor's degree in political science. While there, she will continue her task force work representing that institution through the end of the year.

The Manhattan Dolls to perform in South Haven

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Hop aboard the "Chattanooga Choo Choo" and join The Manhattan Dolls on a "Sentimental Journey" through the music of the '30s and '40s.

According to a news release, the female vocal trio will perform at 3 p.m. on March 15 as part of First Congregational UCC's concert series.

"Chelsee, Brianna and Miranda, aka The Manhattan Dolls, will take you on a Sentimental Journey of WWII-era songs in the style of The Andrews Sisters," the release stated.

The Manhattan Dolls originated in New York City in 2009 as a swing-style female vocal trio with the sound of The Andrews Sisters. Founded by Heather Stricker DeBenedetti, a former USO Girl, the dolls travel the world performing for military events, air shows, award ceremonies, parades, jazz clubs and concert series.

"Sit back and enjoy these timeless classics, or if you're in the mood, get up and dance," the release stated. "Sentimental Journey blends beautiful ballads with your favorite toe-tapping tunes. From boogie woogie to the blues, Sentimental Journey celebrates the best the Great American Songbook has to offer."

The group has been featured on The Rachael Ray Show, BBC Radio London, Fox and Friends, LX 4 NY, The Tucson Morning Blend and Cincinnati Local 12. They have had the pleasure of performing with famous bands including: The Jive Aces in the UK, The Cotton Candies in France, The George Gee Orchestra and The Stan Rubin Orchestra in NYC.

The Manhattan Dolls, now based in Tucson, Ariz., are constantly touring the United States and abroad.

Tickets cost $20 at the door and is free for children 12 and under.

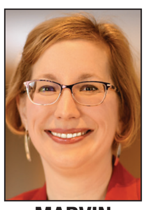
For more information, call 269-637-3804.

Photo provided

The female vocal trio The Manhattan Dolls will perform at First Congregational UCC as part of their concert series.

Presentation to honor women's history month in SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF



MARVIN

SOUTH HAVEN — The Historical Association of South Haven will host a special presentation In honor of Women's History Month on March 10.

According to a news release, Michigan State Capitol Director of Education and History Valerie Marvin will present "Saving Michigan's Past: Women and Historic Preservation" at 7 p.m. at the Hartman School headquarters.

"For more than 150 years, Michigan women have proudly preserved state and local history in libraries, museums, community centers, clubs and public buildings," the release stated "They've suffered horrific defeats – like the loss of the old Grand Rapids City Hall – and won magnificent victories, including the preservation of Michigan's Capitol."

The presentation is free and open to the public.

"Join us to learn about their work, legacies and the tools they've left behind for us," the release stated.

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Will Michigan opt into Trump's school choice program – Whitmer hasn't decided

By SARAH ATWOOD
The Detroit News (TNS)

TROY — Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said Wednesday she would need more information before deciding whether Michigan would join at least 23 other states in opting in to a federal scholarship program giving taxpayers up to $1,700 for private school tuition or other educational uses.

The Democrat governor said President Donald Trump's Education Freedom Tax Credit, created by his Working Families Tax Cuts Act, was a "high-level talking point" for the Republican administration.

"They've not put out any guidance," Whitmer said at an event at a Troy school promoting free school lunches. "I'm always going to leverage as much in terms of investment as we can for education and help people keep money in their pockets, but there's very little actual detail that's been released on this particular subject."

In June 2025, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance on the school choice program. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education said it sent a letter to all chief state school officers about how the states could spend their federal formula funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to expand education choice and turn around failing schools.

Whitmer's Director of Communications Bobby Leddy later clarified that Whitmer was awaiting tax guidance from the federal government.

The tax credit would allow individual taxpayers to receive a federal tax credit for donating to nonprofits that grant scholarships to students to pay for education expenses, such as textbooks, tutoring and tuition at private and religious schools, or additional support for students with disabilities. The tax credit is set to begin in 2027.

In 2021, Whitmer vetoed a similar school choice effort at the state level. She struck down two bills approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature and backed by west Michigan's DeVos family that would have created an education scholarship program giving contributors a tax break on donations that could be used for a variety of education services, including private school tuition.

"Simply put, our schools cannot provide the high-quality education our kids deserve if we turn private schools into tax shelters for the wealthy," Whitmer said at the time. "The movement to privatize education in this state has been a catastrophic failure, causing Michigan students to fall behind the rest of the nation."

The Democratic governors of New Mexico, Oregon and Wisconsin have said they plan to opt out of the Trump school choice program, Bloomberg reported in October.

The governor of a state must choose to opt into the program, the U.S. Department of Education said in a fact sheet. When a state is "covered," its officials must identify potential "scholarship-granting organizations." Taxpayers in the covered states would donate to those organizations and would receive a tax credit for up to $1,700 to use for their children to attend schools of their choice, such as private or religious schools, or other educational products and services.

The department defined SGOs as charities that use at least 90 percent of their income on scholarships for education choice options for eligible K-12 students and are banned from providing scholarships for any other expenses.

In neighboring Ohio and Indiana, both states with Republican governors who have opted into the program, those charities include the Waldorf Method Education Scholarship Association and Professional Athletes of Indiana.

The Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

K-12 Alliance of Michigan Executive Director Robert McCann said he hoped Whitmer would not choose to opt into the program.

"Michigan voters have been clear on more than one occasion that they do not support using public tax dollars, directly or indirectly, for private schools," McCann said in an email, referring to a Michigan constitutional ban on school vouchers and unsuccessful efforts to legalize it through ballot initiatives. "This idea would not only violate the Michigan Constitution but would also further divert money from already underfunded public schools to benefit the wealthiest Michiganders. We certainly hope that Governor Whitmer continues to do the right thing in not pursuing this harmful program."

Molly Macek, the director of education policy for the Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a longtime school choice champion, said she hoped Whitmer would decide to opt into the program. If not, she worried that Michigan families would miss out on needed scholarship money.

"There's nothing on this scale available to families looking for scholarships for private schools," Macek said. "This would expand options significantly. ... Most Michigan families would be eligible for the tax credit."

Macek added that families might still get to receive tax credits through donations made to SGOs in other states. But if Michigan didn't opt in, she said, the state's educational charities that could be designated as SGOs would miss out on the donations.

A report cited in the U.S. Department of Education's fact sheet from the Democrats for Education Reform said the tax credit will generate an additional $24 billion in education funding annually, and every $1 billion in scholarships could fund tuition at a school of choice for 77,000 students or cover tutoring for more than 300,000 students.

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

South Haven Memorial Library: Food Drive for non-perishable food items from March 5 through 31. For each item brought, you will be eligible for $0.50 in fine forgiveness up to $5.00 total.

March

9 – South Haven Garden Club: Meeting with guest speaker Nate Fuller from Sarret Nature Center discussing studying migrating birds. Social time begins at 12:30 p.m. and the general meeting begins at 1 p.m.

10 – Historical Association of South Haven: "Saving Michigan's Past: Women and Historic Preservation" presented by Valerie Marvin at 7 p.m. at Hartman School headquarters.

11 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

12 – South Haven Indivisible: Book discussion on "The Flag and the Cross" from 4 to 5 p.m. at the South Haven Memorial Library.

12 – South Haven Area Young Professionals: Monthly networking event from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at South Haven Brewpub

13-14 – South Haven High School: fall production of "The Olympians" at 7 p.m.

15 – South Haven High School: fall production of "The Olympians" at 2 p.m.

15 – First Congregational UCC: Concert series featuring The Manhattan Dolls at 3 p.m. Tickets are $20 at the door.

17 – Scott Club: Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with music, Celtics and classics at 1 p.m. at Senior Services.

18 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: DIY at the library event to learn how to make homemade sugar scrubs at 4 p.m.

19 – Baseball: Boys Junior Varsity against Michigan Lutheran High School at 4 p.m.

19-20 – Our Town Players: Auditions for "The Mad Tea Party" from 6 to 8 p.m. at the South Haven Center for the Arts. Open for actors ages 13 and older. The cast is up to 15 actors.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon. Wear clothes that can get messy.

21 – South Haven Memorial Library: Free STEM Saturdays event with legos and other rotating STEM activities from 11 a.m. to noon.

23 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Three Rivers High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Friends of the South Haven library meeting from 2 to 3 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

25 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Berrien Springs High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: South Haven High School summer job fair.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

28 – South Haven Indivisible: No Kings 3 protest from 1 to 3 p.m. on Phoenix Road east of Broadway near First Congregational Church.

What constitutional carry would mean for Michigan gun owners

By CHAD LIVENGOOD
The Detroit News (TNS)

A group of Republican lawmakers wants to get rid of Michigan's law requiring residents to have a permit to carry a concealed pistol.

Legislation introduced this week in the GOP-controlled Michigan House would repeal the state's concealed pistol permit law, allowing residents to carry a handgun without any identification that they're permitted to do so.

The Republican-authored bills seek to make Michigan a so-called "constitutional carry" state, where residents can assert their Second Amendment right to bear arms when carrying a concealed handgun into public places.

"It's time for Michigan to put into law what dozens of other states across our country have already realized," state Rep. Mike Hoadley, R-Au Gres, said in a statement. "These permit requirements are a misguided attempt to protect people. In reality, they only serve as a hindrance to responsible gun owners who are already well-versed in gun safety. Whether you own a firearm or not, we have to recognize that regularly exercising our rights is the only way we can actually defend them."

Even if the legislation gets approved by the House, the bills face dim prospects of getting past the Democratic-controlled Michigan Senate, where senators have pursued legislation in recent years to significantly limit the places where individuals with concealed pistol licenses can carry a firearm.

House Bills 5653 -5657 were introduced Tuesday in the Michigan House of Representatives and assigned to the judiciary committee.

But if the bills were to become law, Michigan would become the 30th state to adopt a "constitutional carry" law, according to House Republicans.

"The right to self-defense should be safeguarded from government overreach, yet Lansing politicians have undermined it for decades," state Rep. Joseph Fox, R-Fremont, said in a statement. "We now have an opportunity to ensure that the state of Michigan takes a clear stand by protecting the constitutional rights that define our nation's history and legacy."

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Mario Tama / Getty Images / TNS

Boxes of the diabetes drug Ozempic rest on a pharmacy counter on April 17, 2023, in Los Angeles.

Should drug companies be advertising to consumers?

By PAULA SPAN
KFF Health News (TNS)

Tamar Abrams had a lousy couple of years in 2022 and '23. Both her parents died; a relationship ended; she retired from communications consulting. She moved from Arlington, Virginia, to Warren, Rhode Island, where she knew all of two people.

"I was kind of a mess," recalled Abrams, 69. Trying to cope, "I was eating myself into oblivion." As her weight hit 270 pounds and her blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels climbed, "I knew I was in trouble health-wise."

What came to mind? "Oh, oh, oh, Ozempic!" – the tuneful ditty from television commercials that promoted the GLP-1 medication for diabetes. The ads also pointed out that patients who took it lost weight.

Abrams remembered the commercials as "joyful" and sometimes found herself humming the jingle. They depicted Ozempic-takers cooking omelets, repairing bikes, playing pickleball – "doing everyday activities, but with verve," she said. "These people were enjoying the hell out of life."

So, just as such ads often urge, even though she had never been diagnosed with diabetes, she asked her doctor if Ozempic was right for her.

Small wonder Abrams recalled those ads. Novo Nordisk, which manufactures Ozempic, spent an estimated $180 million in direct-to-consumer advertising in 2022 and $189 million in 2023, according to MediaRadar, which monitors advertising.

By last year, the sum – including radio and TV commercials, billboards, and print and digital ads – had reached an estimated $201 million, and total spending on direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs topped $9 billion, by MediaRadar's calculations.

Novo Nordisk declined to address those numbers.

Should it be legal to market drugs directly to potential patients? This controversy, which has simmered for decades, has begun receiving renewed attention from both the Trump administration and legislators.

The question has particular relevance for older adults, who contend with more medical problems than younger people and are more apt to take prescription drugs. "Part of aging is developing health conditions and becoming a target of drug advertising," said Steven Woloshin, who studies health communication and decision-making at the Dartmouth Institute.

The debate over direct-to-consumer ads dates to 1997, when the FDA loosened restrictions and allowed prescription drug ads on television as long as they included a rapid-fire summary of major risks and provided a source for further information.

"That really opened the door," said Abby Alpert, a health economist at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

The introduction of Medicare Part D, in 2006, brought "a huge expansion in prescription drug coverage and, as a result, a big increase in pharmaceutical advertising," Alpert added. A study she co-wrote in 2023 found that pharmaceutical ads were much more prevalent in areas with a high proportion of residents 65 and older.

Industry and academic research have shown that ads influence prescription rates. Patients are more apt to make appointments and request drugs, either by brand name or by category, and doctors often comply. Multiple follow-up visits may ensue.

But does that benefit consumers? Most developed countries take a hard pass. Only New Zealand and, despite the decadelong opposition of the American Medical Association, the United States allow direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising.

Public health advocates argue that such ads encourage the use and overuse of expensive new medications, even when existing, cheaper drugs work as effectively. (Drug companies don't bother advertising once patents expire and generic drugs become available.)

In a 2023 study in JAMA Network Open, for instance, researchers analyzed the "therapeutic value" of the drugs most advertised on television, based on the assessments of independent European and Canadian organizations that negotiate prices for approved drugs.

Nearly three-quarters of the top-advertised medications didn't perform markedly better than older ones, the analysis found.

"Often, really good drugs sell themselves," said Aaron Kesselheim, senior author of the study and director of the Program on Regulation, Therapeutics, and Law at Harvard University.

"Drugs without added therapeutic value need to be pushed, and that's what direct-to-consumer advertising does," he said.

Opponents of a ban on such advertising say it benefits consumers. "It provides information and education to patients, makes them aware of available treatments and leads them to seek care," Alpert said. That is "especially important for underdiagnosed conditions," like depression.

Moreover, she wrote in a recent JAMA Health Forum commentary, direct-to-consumer ads lead to increased use not only of brand-name drugs but also of non-advertised substitutes, including generics.

The Trump administration entered this debate last September, with a presidential memorandum calling for a return to the pre-1997 policy severely restricting direct-to-consumer drug advertising.

That position has repeatedly been urged by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has charged that "pharmaceutical ads hooked this country on prescription drugs."

At the same time, the FDA said it was issuing 100 cease-and-desist orders about deceptive drug ads and sending "thousands" of warnings to pharmaceutical companies to remove misleading ads. Marty Makary, the FDA commissioner, blasted drug ads in an essay in The New York Times.

"There's a lot of chatter," Woloshin said of those actions. "I don't know that we'll see anything concrete."

This month, however, the FDA notified Novo Nordisk that the agency had found its TV spot for a new oral version of Wegovy false and misleading. Novo Nordisk said in an email that it was "in the process of responding to the FDA" to address the concerns.

Meanwhile, Democratic and independent senators who rarely align with the Trump administration also have introduced legislation to ban or limit direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical ads.

Last February, independent Sen. Angus King of Maine and two other sponsors introduced a bill prohibiting direct-to-consumer ads for the first three years after a drug gains FDA approval.

King said in an email that the act would better inform consumers "by making sure newly approved drugs aren't allowed to immediately flood the market with ads before we fully understand their impact on the general public."

Then, in June, he and independent Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont proposed legislation to ban such ads entirely. That might prove difficult, Woloshin said, given the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling protecting corporate speech.

Moreover, direct-to-consumer ads represent only part of the industry's promotional efforts. Pharmaceutical firms actually spend more money advertising to doctors than to consumers.

Although television still accounts for most consumer spending, because it's expensive, Kesselheim pointed to "the mostly unregulated expansion of direct-to-consumer ads onto the web" as a particular concern. Drug sales themselves are bypassing doctors' practices by moving online.

Woloshin said that "disease awareness campaigns" – for everything from shingles to restless legs – don't mention any particular drug but are "often marketing dressed up as education."

He advocates more effective educational campaigns, he said, "to help consumers become more savvy and skeptical and able to recognize reliable versus unreliable information."

For example, Woloshin and Lisa Schwartz, a late colleague, designed and tested a simple " drug facts box," similar to the nutritional labeling on packaged foods, that summarizes and quantifies the benefits and harms of medications.

For now, consumers have to try to educate themselves about the drugs they see ballyhooed on TV.

Abrams read a lot about Ozempic. Her doctor agreed that trying it made sense.

Abrams was referred to an endocrinologist, who decided that her blood glucose was high enough to warrant treatment. Three years later and 90 pounds lighter, she feels able to scramble after her 2-year-old grandson, enjoys Zumba classes, and no longer needs blood pressure or cholesterol drugs.

So Abrams is unsure, she said, how to feel about a possible ban on direct-to-consumer drug ads.

"If I hadn't asked my new doctor about it, would she have suggested Ozempic?" Abrams wondered. "Or would I still weigh 270 pounds?"

The New Old Age is produced through a partnership with The New York Times. KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

FOCUS

Dreamstime / TNS

It is legal to garnish patients' wages for medical debt in all but a few states, according to the Commonwealth Fund, a nonprofit foundation based in New York focused on health care.

State lawmakers seek restraints on wage garnishment for medical debt

By RAE ELLEN BICHELL
KFF Health News (TNS)

Lawmakers in at least eight states this year are aiming to reel in wage garnishment for unpaid medical bills.

The legislation introduced in Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, and Washington builds on efforts made in other states in past years. This latest push for patient protections comes as the Trump administration has backed away from federal debt protections, health care has become more costly, and more people are expected to go without medical coverage or choose cheaper but riskier high-deductible insurance plans that could lead them into debt.

"In the wealthiest country on Earth, people are going bankrupt, suffering wage garnishment, just because they get sick," said Colorado state Rep. Javier Mabrey, a Democrat who introduced legislation on Feb. 19 that would, among other measures, ban wage garnishment for medical debt.

That legislation is under consideration after a KFF Health News investigation found that courts approved wage garnishment requests in an estimated 14,000 medical debt cases a year in Colorado. The investigation also showed that it isn't just urban hospitals or big health care chains allowing their patients' wages to be garnished. It's also small rural hospitals, physician groups, and public ambulance services, among other medical care providers. And the reporting showed that wage garnishment can erroneously target patients. For example, one family lost wages – and subsequently power to their home, because they couldn't pay their electric bill – after an ambulance company incorrectly billed the family instead of Medicaid.

Wage garnishment is one tool creditors can use in most states to recoup money from people with unpaid bills. In many states, they can garnish someone's bank account or put a lien on their home, too. To garnish a person's wages, a creditor must typically get permission from a court to make the person's employer hand over a piece of the debtor's earnings.

"The creditor is taking the money directly out of somebody's paycheck, and so it doesn't leave people with any choice to say, 'I need to prioritize food for my children,'" said Lauren Jones, legal and policy director for the National Center for Access to Justice. The center, based at Fordham Law School, scores states and the District of Columbia on how fair their laws are to consumers who get sued over debt.

It is legal to garnish patients' wages for medical debt in all but a few states, according to the Commonwealth Fund, a nonprofit foundation based in New York focused on health care.

Now, lawmakers in additional states seek to ban the practice entirely. Others want to limit it by exempting debtors whose household income falls under a certain threshold or by upping the amount of earnings immune from garnishment.

Such policies on wage garnishment fit into a larger push around the country to address the effect of medical debt on people's lives and finances. Those efforts include barring medical debt from credit reports, prohibiting liens on people's homes, capping interest rates, and limiting the ability to file lawsuits against people with low incomes over unpaid medical bills.

Debt collectors have fought against such measures, arguing they don't solve the problem of health care affordability and hurt the ability of medical providers to continue to provide care.

"The wage garnishment process is already highly regulated at the federal and state level and includes many consumer protection measures," said Scott Purcell, chief executive of ACA International , an association of credit and collection professionals.

Even before the Colorado legislation was introduced, BC Services sent a letter warning its clients that the legislation "poses an existential threat," especially to rural health providers. And Bridget Frazier, a spokesperson for the Colorado Hospital Association, said Feb. 20 that the bill "could drive up costs and financial risk for health care providers, making it harder to keep hospitals sustainable and ensuring Coloradans have access to care when they need it most."

The pending Colorado measure would ban wage garnishment for all patients. It also would limit bank garnishments, in which a patient's financial institution must hand over a chunk of the money in the person's account. Additionally, among other things, it would prevent payment plans from exceeding 4 percent of weekly net income, require creditors to check whether uninsured patients are eligible for public health insurance before collecting, bar creditors from collecting on bills that are more than three years old, and leave medical care providers liable to the patient for at least $3,000 if collectors don't comply.

"No one is saying, 'Don't get paid for your services.' We're saying getting health care should not lead to financial ruin for people," said Dana Kennedy, co-executive director at the Denver-based Center for Health Progress, a health advocacy group that has been working with lawmakers on the Colorado measure.

Kennedy said that KFF Health News' investigation drove home how many kinds of Colorado health care facilities are willing to let this collection practice happen to their patients, and that the people whose wages are being garnished are often working at Family Dollar, Walmart, Amazon, or gas stations and restaurants.

"Medical debt is typically different from other forms of indebtedness," said Colorado state Sen. Mike Weissman, a Democrat co-sponsoring the legislation. "You could choose to keep driving your old car or buy a new one and take on debt for that. You could upgrade your home. You could buy consumer appliances. There's not usually that voluntary element in a health care context."

Carolyn Carter, a senior attorney with the National Consumer Law Center, said broad laws that don't require patients to jump through hoops to access protections are the most likely to be effective. Because of that, she and other consumer advocates prefer state policies that get rid of wage garnishment for all debtors and all types of debt.

"It can be hard to identify medical debt as medical debt," Carter said. "For example, if you have a medical debt and you put it on your credit card, it's not going to be easy for a court system to identify that debt as medical debt."

She said another reason is that complexity is the enemy of effectiveness. Carter pointed to a report about Hamilton County, Tennessee, showing that even though people in the state can keep $10,000 in their bank accounts safe from garnishment, few consumers take advantage of the protection. They must know the protection exists, know where to find the relevant form, get the form notarized, file it, and mail copies to creditors. The same report found that garnishments can also be burdensome for employers, who must process garnishments and can find themselves in court if they make an error.

Jones, at the National Center for Access to Justice, said outlawing wage garnishment fully, rather than limiting it, has other benefits. "It's also to protect people's jobs, because in most states, if somebody has two or more orders of garnishment, they can lose their job for it," she said.

Still, some lawmakers are pushing for the intermediate route. In Washington state, Democratic state Sen. Marko Liias is spearheading legislation to rope off a larger portion of low-wage earnings from garnishment. So, for example, a person making $1,000 a week would be able to keep their whole paycheck, as opposed to the $800 that the law would currently protect.

Mindy Chumbley, owner of a Washington-based collections company and an ACA International board member, testified against the bill on Feb. 2. "Washington has made sweeping changes to medical debt policy year after year without pausing to study the cumulative impact," she told lawmakers. "Our clients are reporting clinic closures, urgent care centers shutting down, staffing shortages, and rural facilities struggling to stay open."

The Washington State Hospital Association said it is neutral on the legislation. The American Hospital Association said it does not take positions on state policies.

Liias told KFF Health News that lawmakers need to ensure health care providers can recoup their costs while also protecting patients. "We don't want families either to be driven into bankruptcy or to be driven into under-the-table work to avoid these garnishment thresholds," he said.

Liias said his measure follows the lead of Arizona, which passed similar consumer protections in 2022. "Obviously, the health care system is still functioning in Arizona, and folks are able to make it work."

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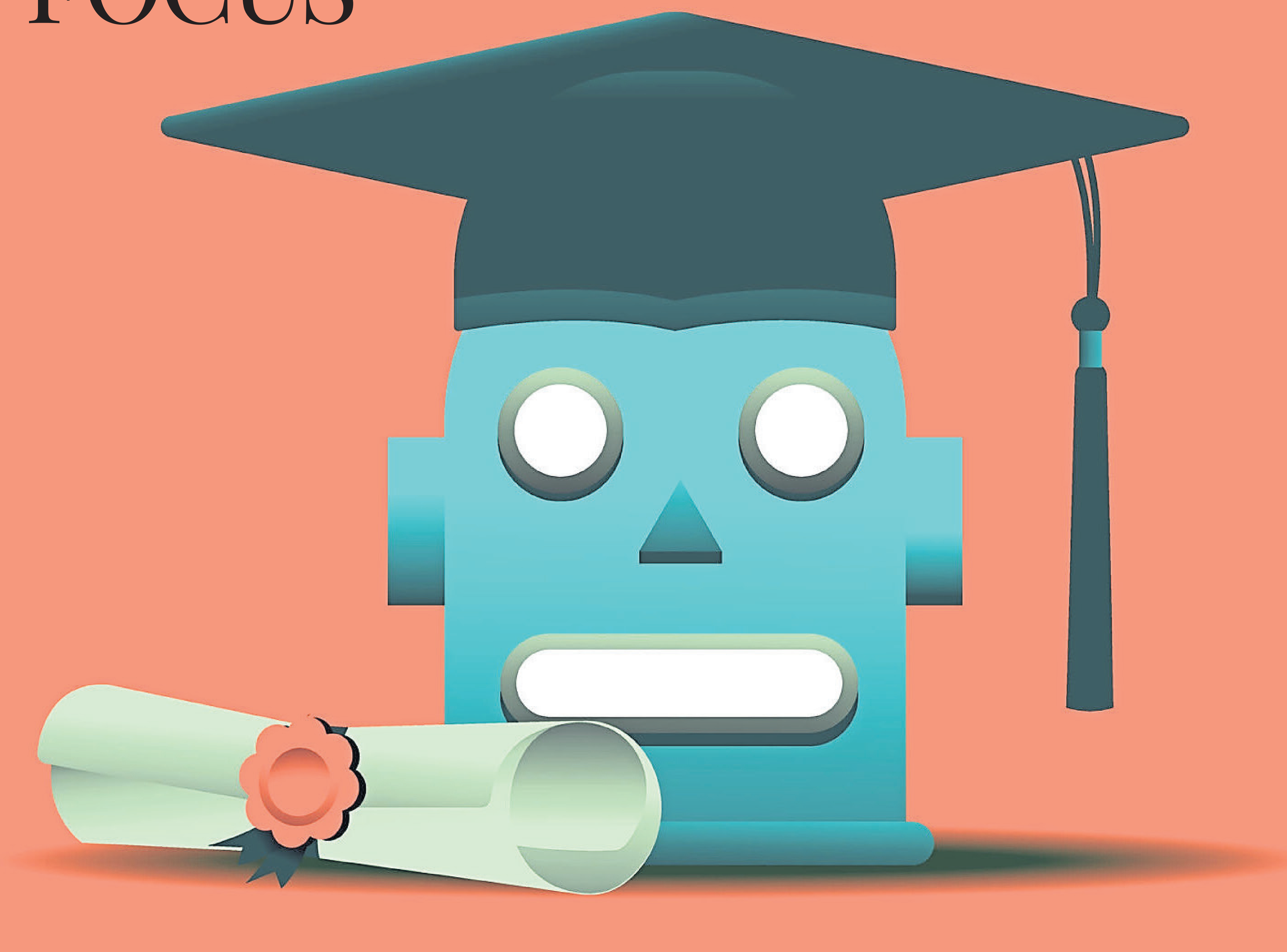

Moor Studio / Getty Images

The greatest risk of AI in higher education isn't cheating – it's the erosion of learning itself

By NIR EISIKOVITS and JACOB BURLEY
UMass Boston (The Conversation)

Public debate about artificial intelligence in higher education has largely orbited a familiar worry: cheating. Will students use chatbots to write essays? Can instructors tell? Should universities ban the tech? Embrace it?

These concerns are understandable. But focusing so much on cheating misses the larger transformation already underway, one that extends far beyond student misconduct and even the classroom.

Universities are adopting AI across many areas of institutional life. Some uses are largely invisible, like systems that help allocate resources, flag "at-risk" students, optimize course scheduling or automate routine administrative decisions. Other uses are more noticeable. Students use AI tools to summarize and study, instructors use them to build assignments and syllabuses and researchers use them to write code, scan literature and compress hours of tedious work into minutes.

People may use AI to cheat or skip out on work assignments. But the many uses of AI in higher education, and the changes they portend, beg a much deeper question: As machines become more capable of doing the labor of research and learning, what happens to higher education? What purpose does the university serve?

Over the past eight years, we've been studying the moral implications of pervasive engagement with AI as part of a joint research project between the Applied Ethics Center at UMass Boston and the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies. In a recent white paper, we argue that as AI systems become more autonomous, the ethical stakes of AI use in higher ed rise, as do its potential consequences.

As these technologies become better at producing knowledge work – designing classes, writing papers, suggesting experiments and summarizing difficult texts – they don't just make universities more productive. They risk hollowing out the ecosystem of learning and mentorship upon which these institutions are built, and on which they depend.

Nonautonomous AI

Consider three kinds of AI systems and their respective impacts on university life:

AI-powered software is already being used throughout higher education in admissions review, purchasing, academic advising and institutional risk assessment. These are considered "nonautonomous" systems because they automate tasks, but a person is "in the loop" and using these systems as tools.

These technologies can pose a risk to students' privacy and data security. They also can be biased. And they often lack sufficient transparency to determine the sources of these problems. Who has access to student data? How are "risk scores" generated? How do we prevent systems from reproducing inequities or treating certain students as problems to be managed?

These questions are serious, but they are not conceptually new, at least within the field of computer science. Universities typically have compliance offices, institutional review boards and governance mechanisms that are designed to help address or mitigate these risks, even if they sometimes fall short of these objectives.

Hybrid AI

Hybrid systems encompass a range of tools, including AI-assisted tutoring chatbots, personalized feedback tools and automated writing support. They often rely on generative AI technologies, especially large language models. While human users set the overall goals, the intermediate steps the system takes to meet them are often not specified.

Hybrid systems are increasingly shaping day-to-day academic work. Students use them as writing companions, tutors, brainstorming partners and on-demand explainers. Faculty use them to generate rubrics, draft lectures and design syllabuses. Researchers use them to summarize papers, comment on drafts, design experiments and generate code.

This is where the "cheating" conversation belongs. With students and faculty alike increasingly leaning on technology for help, it is reasonable to wonder what kinds of learning might get lost along the way. But hybrid systems also raise more complex ethical questions.

One has to do with transparency. AI chatbots offer natural-language interfaces that make it hard to tell when you're interacting with a human and when you're interacting with an automated agent. That can be alienating and distracting for those who interact with them. A student reviewing material for a test should be able to tell if they are talking with their teaching assistant or with a robot. A student reading feedback on a term paper needs to know whether it was written by their instructor. Anything less than complete transparency in such cases will be alienating to everyone involved and will shift the focus of academic interactions from learning to the means or the technology of learning. University of Pittsburgh researchers have shown that these dynamics bring forth feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and distrust for students. These are problematic outcomes.

A second ethical question relates to accountability and intellectual credit. If an instructor uses AI to draft an assignment and a student uses AI to draft a response, who is doing the evaluating, and what exactly is being evaluated? If feedback is partly machine-generated, who is responsible when it misleads, discourages or embeds hidden assumptions? And when AI contributes substantially to research synthesis or writing, universities will need clearer norms around authorship and responsibility – not only for students, but also for faculty.

Finally, there is the critical question of cognitive offloading. AI can reduce drudgery, and that's not inherently bad. But it can also shift users away from the parts of learning that build competence, such as generating ideas, struggling through confusion, revising a clumsy draft and learning to spot one's own mistakes.

Autonomous agents

The most consequential changes may come with systems that look less like assistants and more like agents. While truly autonomous technologies remain aspirational, the dream of a researcher "in a box" – an agentic AI system that can perform studies on its own – is becoming increasingly realistic.

THE CONVERSATION

Agentic tools are anticipated to "free up time" for work that focuses on more human capacities like empathy and problem-solving. In teaching, this may mean that faculty may still teach in the headline sense, but more of the day-to-day labor of instruction can be handed off to systems optimized for efficiency and scale. Similarly, in research, the trajectory points toward systems that can increasingly automate the research cycle. In some domains, that already looks like robotic laboratories that run continuously, automate large portions of experimentation and even select new tests based on prior results.

At first glance, this may sound like a welcome boost to productivity. But universities are not information factories; they are systems of practice. They rely on a pipeline of graduate students and early-career academics who learn to teach and research by participating in that same work. If autonomous agents absorb more of the "routine" responsibilities that historically served as on-ramps into academic life, the university may keep producing courses and publications while quietly thinning the opportunity structures that sustain expertise over time.

The same dynamic applies to undergraduates, albeit in a different register. When AI systems can supply explanations, drafts, solutions and study plans on demand, the temptation is to offload the most challenging parts of learning. To the industry that is pushing AI into universities, it may seem as if this type of work is "inefficient" and that students will be better off letting a machine handle it. But it is the very nature of that struggle that builds durable understanding. Cognitive psychology has shown that students grow intellectually through doing the work of drafting, revising, failing, trying again, grappling with confusion and revising weak arguments. This is the work of learning how to learn.

Taken together, these developments suggest that the greatest risk posed by automation in higher education is not simply the replacement of particular tasks by machines, but the erosion of the broader ecosystem of practice that has long sustained teaching, research and learning.

An uncomfortable inflection point

So what purpose do universities serve in a world in which knowledge work is increasingly automated?

One possible answer treats the university primarily as an engine for producing credentials and knowledge. There, the core question is output: Are students graduating with degrees? Are papers and discoveries being generated? If autonomous systems can deliver those outputs more efficiently, then the institution has every reason to adopt them.

But another answer treats the university as something more than an output machine, acknowledging that the value of higher education lies partly in the ecosystem itself. This model assigns intrinsic value to the pipeline of opportunities through which novices become experts, the mentorship structures through which judgment and responsibility are cultivated, and the educational design that encourages productive struggle rather than optimizing it away. Here, what matters is not only whether knowledge and degrees are produced, but how they are produced and what kinds of people, capacities and communities are formed in the process. In this version, the university is meant to serve as no less than an ecosystem that reliably forms human expertise and judgment.

In a world where knowledge work itself is increasingly automated, we think universities must ask what higher education owes its students, its early-career scholars and the society it serves. The answers will determine not only how AI is adopted, but also what the modern university becomes.

Nir Eisikovits is a professor of philosophy and director of the Applied Ethics Center at UMass Boston. Jacob Burley is a junior research fellow at the Applied Ethics Center.

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FOCUS

Michelangelo hated painting the Sistine Chapel – and never aspired to be a painter to begin with

By ANNA SWARTWOOD HOUSE
University of South Carolina (The Conversation)

When a 5-inch-by-4-inch red chalk drawing of a woman's foot by Michelangelo sold at auction for $27.2 million on Feb. 5, it blew past the $1.5 million to $2 million it was expected to receive.

Experts believe it to be a study for the figure of the Libyan Sibyl, a female prophet who appears on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Michelangelo painted the iconic frescoes from 1508 to 1512, but he first sketched out the overall composition and details in a series of preparatory drawings. Only around 50 of these drawings survive today.

This was an exciting sale for reasons outside that eye-popping sum. Held in private collections for centuries, the drawing only came to light after the owner sent an unsolicited photo to Christie's auction house. There, a drawings expert recognized it as one of the relatively few remaining studies for the Sistine frescoes.

As an art historian who specializes in the Italian Renaissance, I'm excited about the sale not because of the money it fetched, but because of the attention it has brought to Michelangelo's lifelong devotion to drawing, a medium he prized over painting.

'Not my art'

Art historians know a lot about Michelangelo through the letters and poems he penned, along with two biographies written in his lifetime by intimates Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi.

In 1506, Pope Julius II put Michelangelo's sculpting work on a papal tomb at St. Peter's Basilica on hold, redirecting the funds intended for the tomb to the renovation of the basilica itself.

Michelangelo responded by closing his studio. He ordered his workshop assistants to sell off its contents, abandoned 90 wagonloads' worth of marble and left Rome in disgust.

In 1508, Julius and his intermediary, Cardinal Francesco Alidosi, were able to lure Michelangelo back to Rome with the promise of a 500-ducat payment and a contract to paint the Sistine. Despite accepting, the artist went on to complain relentlessly about his new commission. He wrote to his father that painting "is not my profession" and told the pope that painting "is not my art."

Sculpture, not painting, was central to Michelangelo's identity.

In the Condivi biography, which Michelangelo approved and helped shape, the artist is said to have abandoned painter Domenico Ghirlandaio's workshop around 1490 to train in the Florence sculpture garden of powerful arts patron Lorenzo de' Medici. Michelangelo would later joke that he became a sculptor as an infant, thanks to the breast milk of his wet nurse, who was the daughter of stonemasons.

Beyond his enthusiastic embrace of sculpture and resentment over the Sistine – what he called the "tragedy of the tomb" – Michelangelo found painting in fresco to be backbreaking work.

"I've grown a goiter from this torture," he wrote to his friend Giovanni da Pistoia in an illustrated poem. "My stomach's squashed under my chin, my beard's pointing at heaven, my brain's crushed in a casket, my breast twists like a harpy's. My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!"

"My painting is dead," he concludes. "I am not in the right place – I am not a painter."

A grand design

The caricature that accompanies Michelangelo's poem shows not only a cantankerous and restless mind, but also his use of drawing to reflect its inner workings.

The early 16th century witnessed a rise of drawing, with Michelangelo leading the way. Rather than simply copying or providing models for painting, drawing became understood as an important intellectual, exploratory and creative exercise

Michelangelo's biographer Vasari famously used the term "disegno" to mean both a physical drawing and a work's overall "design" or concept, giving the artist an almost godlike creative power.

This double meaning is reflected in the title of the hugely popular 2017 exhibition of Michelangelo's drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York": "Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman and Designer."

Michelangelo created many drawings for the Sistine that reflected the different meanings of "disegno." There were his sketches of models, along with his architectural renderings and schemes to organize the huge space. Then there were the full-size "cartoons" he drew to transfer his designs directly onto the ceiling itself.

The good foot

Michelangelo also made many studies of individual body parts and gestures for the Sistine, including eyes, hands and feet.

In a drawing for the Sistine ceiling that's now in the British Museum, various hands – perhaps modeled after his own – repeat across the right side of the page. Feet were especially important to the overall design of the human figure, and they stand at the intersection of Michelangelo's interests in Classical art and human anatomy.

Contrapposto, or the Classical "counter-poise," was the iconic stance for standing figures in paintings and sculptures. It features the trunk of the body centered over one leg with its foot planted, and the other bent with the foot perched on the toe. Michelangelo's "David" stands in contrapposto, and even doctors today are impressed by the anatomical precision of the muscles and veins of each foot.

The Christie's red chalk drawing of the foot was likely done from a live model, with Michelangelo showing the elegance of the Libyan Sibyl prophetess through her dramatically arched foot.

In the finished fresco, Sibyl's body is a kind of elegant machine. The musculature of her extended arms, her coiled torso and her pointed toe all work in concert. This small drawing shows how the charged energy of a single body part could contribute to the overall "disegno" of the massive fresco.

While the process of painting the ceiling was arduous, the process of conceiving it through drawing was obviously rewarding for Michelangelo.

Drawing as the linchpin

Despite the popularity of the Sistine frescoes, Michelangelo rarely returned to painting after completing them. In 1534, Pope Clement VII commissioned him to paint the "The Last Judgment" on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. But only after Clement died later that year – and Clement's successor, Pope Paul III, gave Michelangelo the extraordinary title of Chief Architect, Sculptor, and Painter to the Vatican Palace – did the artist begin work on the altar wall.

While many people today may think of the Sistine frescoes or Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" when they think of the Italian Renaissance, those artists did not think of themselves primarily as painters.

In a famous letter of introduction to the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, Leonardo elaborates on his many skills in creating fortifications, infrastructure and weaponry. He boasts about his ability to build bridges, canals, tunnels and catapults. Only after 10 paragraphs does he include a single sentence admitting that he, in addition, "can carry out sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay, and in painting can do any kind of work as well as any man."

Like Michelangelo's, Leonardo's drawings show a voracious mind at work. They explore, rather than simply observe, everything from military machines to human anatomy. In 1563, Michelangelo would go on to be named master of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence, which aimed to teach drawing and design as the underlying skills necessary for sculpture, architecture and painting.

Drawing, it turns out, was the art that unified the many pursuits of the "Renaissance Man."

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The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, painted by Michelangelo.

Wikimedia Commons

Michelangelo's Libyan Sibyl in the Sistine Chapel, after a restoration.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Studies for the Libyan Sibyl (recto); Studies for the Libyan Sibyl and a small Sketch for a Seated Figure (verso), by Michelangelo, dated circa 1510-11.

'Learning to be humble meant taming my need to stand out from the group'

A humility scholar explains how he became more grounded

THE CONVERSATION

By BARRET MICHALEC
Arizona State University
(The Conversation)

"Humble" is not a word my colleagues would use to describe me, especially early in my career.

In fact, when word got around that I was researching humility, I suspect more than a few choked on their coffee.

And even though I have spent over a decade exploring the concept as an attribute and as a practice, it wasn't until I recently reflected on my own professional challenges that I truly understood how to embrace humility.

I want to share my journey, but first it is important to understand what humility is – and isn't. It's been extolled as a virtue for centuries, but it's often mischaracterized.

In today's culture, it can be mistaken as a humblebrag, which disguises a boast as modesty – for example, "I really hate talking about myself, but people keep asking how I managed to run a marathon while working full time." Or it can resemble impostor phenomenon, the persistent experience of feeling intellectually or professionally fraudulent despite clear evidence of competence or success.

But research shows that humble people hold accurate views of their own abilities and achievements. They openly acknowledge their mistakes and limitations and are receptive to new ideas. Overall, they recognize their places within a larger whole and genuinely appreciate the value of others.

Humility doesn't always earn praise. Sometimes the humble may be seen as meek, subservient or self-abasing.

For instance, many people praised former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern'sempathetic, self-effacing leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an openness and deference to experts. But some critics dismissed it as weak or soft. These negative views show the various ways people "see" humility.

Generally, though, when humility is understood as grounded self-awareness rather than self-erasure, it's viewed as something worth cultivating and practicing. We see openness, curiosity, acknowledgment of others and a lack of ego in fictional characters like Ted Lasso, hero of the same-titled Apple TV series; Samwise Gamgee in the "Lord of the Rings" books; and Jean-Luc Picard, commander of the USS Enterprise in "Star Trek: The Next Generation."

Humility is also evident in public figures, such as former President Jimmy Carter, children's television host Fred Rogers, and Nelson Mandela, the Black nationalist who served as the first Black president of South Africa.

I'm a sociologist with a focus on medical education and health care providers. At Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, I explore issues including causes of burnout, elements of team-based care and opportunities for emphasizing the human side of health care. In recent years, my work has focused on humility.

From my research and my own experience, I've learned that true humility isn't self-erasure. It's a sense of security and confidence that your value doesn't depend on recognition and that you are just one member of a larger system with a multitude of contributors. By removing the need to dominate, humility fosters openness to collaboration, innovation and an awareness of how the systems around us work.

Still, in a world of Instagram likes and LinkedIn accolades, humility can be the virtue everyone seems to admire but few practice It's the one we say we want – until it requires us to confront the parts of ourselves that crave affirmation.

Climbing the professional ladder

I tend to stand out in a crowd. I'm 6-foot-4, with close-cropped hair, a heavy beard and tattoos. I also push myself to stand out professionally.

Starting in graduate school, I was determined to make my voice heard and sought after. I pursued nearly every opportunity, committee and position that came my way. No role was too small for me to accept.

I strived to present my work in top-tier journals and at conferences, and I cold-called prominent scholars to propose working together. And I constantly shared my findings and thoughts on social media.

Like many workplaces, the academic world has a set of defined success metrics, such as publications, citations of your work, grant funding and teaching evaluations from students. School culture and leadership influence what each college or university considers more or less valuable among those measures. To advance and get promoted, particularly to get tenure, it's important to learn at an early stage what one's department, college or university truly prioritizes.

I wanted to get tenure but also to be seen as an active citizen of academia – energetic, outspoken and unafraid to push boundaries. When my department chair described me as having my hair on fire, I took it as a compliment. I called it "making positive noise."

Initially, the system rewarded that noise. I earned tenure at the University of Delaware and received departmental, college and national awards. I also was appointed to serve as associate dean and to direct a new research center. I felt validated, visible and valuable.

The sociology department at the University of Delaware had a typical academic culture that's often summarized as "publish or perish." The most important measures of scholars' work were writing, publishing their work in respected journals and having other researchers cite those studies. Securing external funding from government, private companies or foundations was valued but was not as high a priority as publishing.

A new beginning that felt like an end

In 2020 I received a new opportunity at Arizona State University, a much larger school that branded itself as a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship. I was offered the chance to direct the Center for Advancing Interprofessional Practice, Education and Research and to step into the shoes of a leader I deeply admired. I arrived expecting to be a big fish in a bigger pond.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

I showed up imagining there'd be a bit of buzz around my arrival given my time at the University of Delaware. But reality didn't match the script: no greeting, office or nameplate marked my place when I arrived.

Early conversations with administrators weren't about my research or teaching visions – the things that I thought set me apart. Instead, I felt they tended to focus on how much external funding I could raise from foundations and government agencies. My new colleagues often spoke in a shorthand of grant-based acronyms when referring to what projects they were working on, a "language" I was woefully unfamiliar with.

To make matters worse, I arrived during COVID-19, with classes either canceled or taught online and faculty members working mainly from home. The hallway chatter, open doors and spontaneous collaboration that I was accustomed to were absent. I began to feel alienated and disoriented as a scholar.

Even after ASU resumed in-person classes in the fall of 2021, I felt like the silence and distance lingered. No students waited for office hours. I struggled to make connections with my colleagues. I eagerly proposed collaborations when really everyone was just trying to find their footing in this new era of education.

My proposals for new classes and curricular programs hit up against institutional barriers I was unaware of. At one point, a college administrator asked, "How do we get you on other people's grants?" – a question that I took to imply that they felt my research wasn't strong enough.

It appeared that my colleagues in Edson College were accustomed to these values and spoke the language. I was a stranger in a strange land. Although I was producing some of my best work, measured in terms of publications and citations, I felt no one seemed interested. I had come from an environment where I felt known and valued to one where I seemed to be a nobody.

I felt as though I needed to staple my resume to my forehead and parade around the hallways asserting, like Ron Burgundy in the movie "Anchorman," "I'm not quite sure how to put this, but … I'm kind of a big deal. People know me."

The impact of feeling unseen

For people who have built careers by being highly engaged and visible, suddenly feeling unseen can be devastating. In any profession, a fear that you don't belong at your workplace can be debilitating and make you question your own value.

I sought advice from peers and college leaders, and even hired a professional coach. Things only worsened. Curricular proposals were stalled or turned down. My center was shuttered in a restructuring, although it was meeting its goals and earning international recognition.

At first, I blamed ASU and Edson College for my feelings of disconnection. I thought the leadership structure and style was dysfunctional; that many colleagues were cold, unfriendly and conformist; and that the college's stated values were inauthentic.

This series of what I came to call "unacknowledgments" sent me into a personal and professional tailspin. Negativity and self-doubt consumed me, and I truly worried that my career was over. Had I been blackballed? Why did it feel as though no one cared?

When the noise turns inward

I had spent years studying empathy – the ability to understand and feel what someone else is feeling – and how to cultivate it among health care professionals and students in order to support more patient-centered care. To that end, at the University of Delaware I had developed a program designed to foster empathy across health professions. It aimed to help students see one another as collaborators, build shared respect and recognize their collective role on the same health care delivery team.

But when I further analyzed the program's outcomes from my office at ASU, I realized that empathy wasn't enough. It could help students feel with others, but it didn't necessarily help them see themselves, or others, differently.

I realized that what I really wanted the students to develop was humility. This step would require them to recognize their limits, accept that they were fallible, see themselves as part of a larger team and value others' contributions.

That realization changed my research trajectory – and eventually, my professional life.

Research becomes a mirror

Initially, I approached humility solely as a scholar. I examined the history of the concept and gaps in existing research on it, and I analyzed how humility was connected to uncertainty and the impostor phenomenon. I explored how humility could enhance team-based care and developed a new way to define humility among health care professionals in order to promote more collaboration and patient-centeredness.

As my own professional world began to unravel, and as I dived deeper into the concept of humility through my research, something unexpected happened. I realized that humility wasn't just an idea to study – it was becoming a mirror that made me rethink my own perspective.

Slowly, I began to see how pride and insecurity were entwined in my reactions to my new setting at ASU. I realized that my need to be noticed, and my insistence that others validate my worth, represented my own kind of arrogance.

Perhaps my ambition had been less about contributing and more about gaining external validation. I had lost the selfless wonder and awe that drive scholarly inquiry and curiosity. And now I had to confront what remained when the spotlight dimmed.

Humility, I began to understand, wasn't just an abstract concept to explore "out there" among others. I needed to hone it internally by thinking beyond myself. By decentering my ego, I realized that I could nurture and sustain curiosity in its own right.

In short, I needed to practice what I was preaching. It wasn't an easy lesson. I assume that cultivating humility never is.

To that end, I felt that it was essential to develop a program to help build humility "muscles." In 2024 I developed HIIT for Humility, an online training package for individuals or groups, modeled after the fitness concept of high-intensity interval training. This program provides evidence-based strategies to help users start building "habits of humility," such as acknowledgment of others and self-awareness.

Just as physical exercise requires consistency to produce results, so does the cultivation of humility. Leaning into HIIT for Humility workouts gradually eased my sense of alienation and defensiveness. I became more appreciative of others, less quick to judge and better able to listen to others' perspectives. In doing so, I started to feel more confident and secure.

While I still took pride in my work, I began to see that my contributions were not the only ones that mattered. I also found that I could stretch into unfamiliar but necessary tasks, such as working harder to win federal and foundation grants and seeing the value of my colleagues' contributions to science.

Why am I here?

Only a few years into this process, I can see that ASU and Edson College have unintentionally taught me humility by signaling, often quietly, which contributions are deemed essential and which forms of success carry the most weight. Navigating stalled proposals, shifting priorities and structural reorganizations have required me to recalibrate my ego, expectations and identity.

Not being seen as a "big fish" and being expected to persist without consistent recognition have required me to understand my work as part of a larger system with differing values and, at times, challenging constraints. Shifting to ASU forced me to rethink my identity as a professor and to reevaluate my sense of purpose from the inside out.

A colleague of mine often asks students who he feels are coasting along, "Why are you here?" Lately, I've taken that question personally. What is the point of being a professor – writing papers, submitting grant proposals, teaching courses? Why did I choose this path in the first place?

When I feel unseen, unheard or unappreciated, pondering why I'm here helps ground me. For anyone who is struggling to feel visible or valued at work, I strongly recommend considering this simple question.

Over time, I've stopped needing to be the big fish in the pond and measuring my worth in titles and awards. I now see that my responsibility as a scholar, teacher and human being is to stay curious, listen more deeply and make space for others' voices.

Embracing humility, and consistently using my humility muscles, have helped me realize that I'm here to be part of the creative energy of academia, do the work and cultivate curiosity in my students, my peers and myself.

Barret Michalec is a research associate professor of nursing and health innovation at Arizona State University. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

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HEALTH

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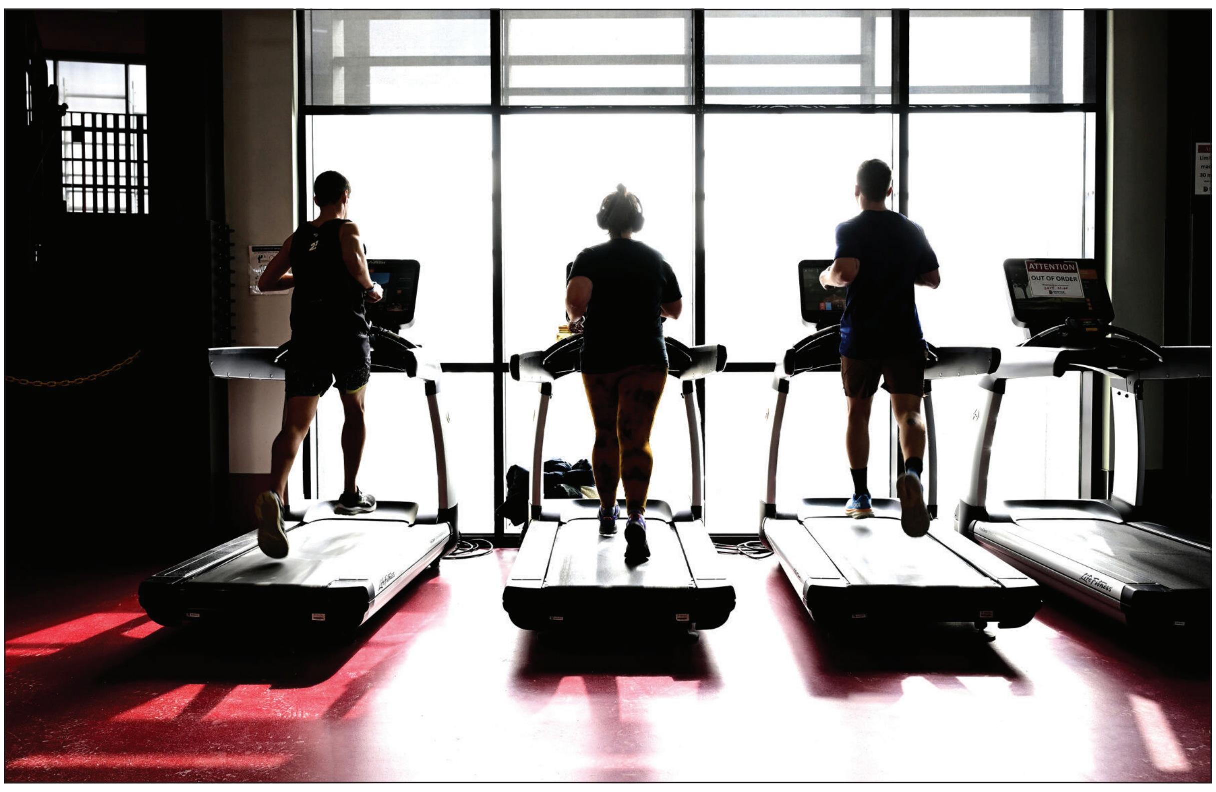
Exercise can make you feel good

So why do so many people hate doing it?

By MEG WINGERTER
The Denver Post (TNS)



Andy Cross / The Denver Post / TNS

People work out at a recreation center in Denver in 2025.

DENVER — The evidence is clear: Exercise has mental health benefits, although studies have come to different conclusions about how large it might be.

And yet, when February rolls around again, the gyms suddenly aren't so crowded as New Year's resolutions lose their shine. Nationwide, only about 30 percent of people meet the federal guidelines for physical activity.

So if exercise gets the endorphins flowing and gives a quick mood boost, why do many people find it hard to stick with?

The popular perception that exercise produces endorphins, which then raise mood, isn't wrong, but it oversimplifies complex interactions between brain chemistry and mental states, said Katrina Oselinsky, a post-doctoral researcher at the Health and Wellness Center on the University of Colorado's Anschutz Medical Campus.

The same person could experience the same workout differently from day to day, depending on how they're feeling, what else is happening in their lives and the setting where they exercise, she said.

"While endorphins are part of the picture, there's a lot more going on," Oselinsky said. "The same workout can feel energizing for one person and uncomfortable for another."

While a subset of people get an immediate "runner's high" in response to intense exercise, not everybody has the same experience, which can set others up for disappointment, said Emily Hemendinger, an assistant professor of psychiatry at CU Anschutz.

Brains differ in how sensitive they are to rewards, so some people are primed to get more or less enjoyment out of exercise – though, obviously, factors such as past experiences with exercise matter, she said.

Exercise does trigger a release of chemicals that give most people at least some sense of pleasure, but it doesn't generate a tsunami that could drown out a person's lack of comfort in their body, fear that others are judging them, perfectionism, boredom, physical pain or exhaustion, Hemendinger said.

"It's not like doing drugs, and what that lights up in our brain right away," she said.

For most of human history, exercise didn't exist as a separate activity: We moved because we needed to find food or because we were doing something inherently rewarding, such as dancing, said Marcelo Bigliassi, an assistant professor at Florida International University.

Now, people need to find a motivation for exercise, which isn't always readily apparent, he said.

"We don't do anything without a reason," Bigliassi said.

While the brain releases dopamine, triggering the desire to repeat exercise, it can also get "really creative" in coming up with ways to avoid something uncomfortable, Bigliassi said. To get around that, people need to focus on finding something challenging enough to give them a sense of accomplishment, but not so tough that they give up, he said.

"We don't want people to find something they don't like, exercise at high intensity, probably injure themselves and … feel like a failure," he said.

The data is clear that, over time, exercise improves both mental health and cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, Bigliassi said. But many people give up long before they see those benefits because they set themselves up to fail or aren't prepared for bumps along the way, he said.

"Consistency is much more important than everything else," he said.

People who believe they'll be able to accomplish what they're trying to do report more enjoyment from a workout than those who feel defeated at the start, Oselinsky said. Having support from the people around you also improves the experience, and new exercisers tend to develop more positive feelings as they get better at the activity, she said.

Of course, we humans aren't always great at sticking to something we don't like, even if we know it brings benefits. So a non-exerciser's best bet is to choose an activity they like or to bundle exercise with something else they enjoy, such as getting outside, spending time with a friend or pet, or listening to music or podcasts, Oselinsky said.

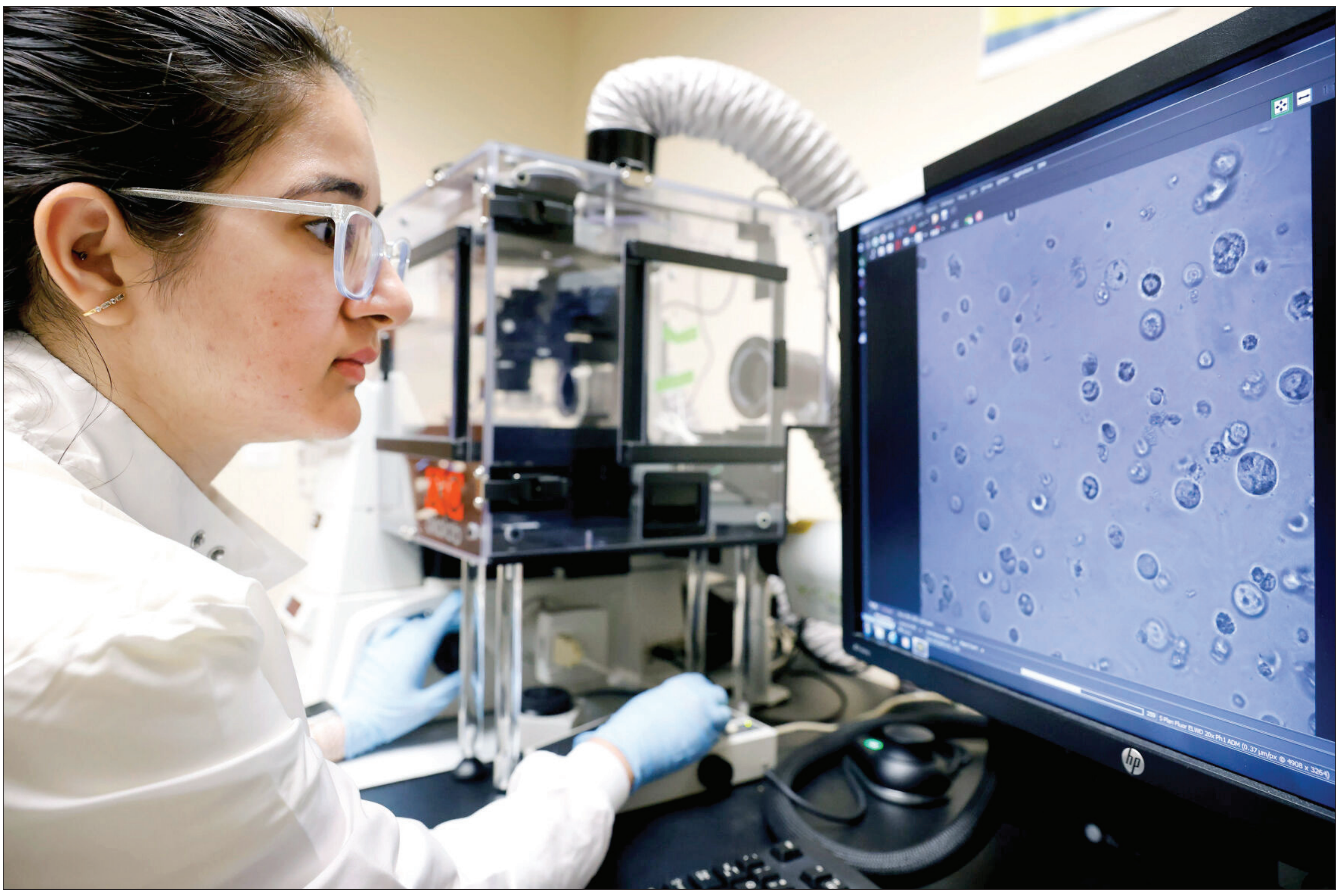
"If you're trying to force yourself to stick with something you don't like, it's going to be harder," she said.

People often feel that they have to go to a gym, but movement throughout the day can be as good as a dedicated exercise session, Oselinsky said. That could look like doing physical labor at work, schlepping toddlers whose motivation to walk is shaky, or tending a backyard garden come spring.

Federal guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week, with some sort of muscle-strengthening exercise on two days.

But any movement that someone enjoys is a step in the right direction, whether that means jumping on a trampoline or playing with their dog, Hemendinger said.

"Joyful movement's hard to find, but it's important," she said.



Tom Fox / The Dallas Morning News / TNS

Doctoral student Roopal Dhar studies the effect of inflammation on breast cancer cells during research at University of Texas at Dallas in Richardson.

How the environment may affect your breast cancer risk

By MIRIAM FAUZIA
The Dallas Morning News (TNS)

In the United States, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women. While genetics and hormones shape a person's risk for developing breast cancer, researchers have been investigating how environmental exposures – from air pollution to chemicals – may influence the disease over time. Here's what to know.

What causes breast cancer?

Scientists can't pinpoint a single cause for most breast cancers, but research shows risk is shaped by several factors.

Anywhere from 5 percent to 10 percent of breast cancers are due to inheriting harmful gene mutations, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mutations in the so-called breast cancer, or BRCA, genes are the most common; people who carry a BRCA mutation are estimated to be five to almost eight times more likely to develop breast cancer, according to a 2021 study in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Getty Images

Hormones also play a role. Women who begin menstruating early – especially before age 12 – and therefore have more menstrual cycles over their lifetime have a slightly higher risk for breast cancer, likely because they're exposed to the hormones estrogen and progesterone for longer, according to the American Cancer Society. Those hormones act as a fuel for breast cancer cells, encouraging them to grow and spread.

How does the environment shape breast cancer risk?

A person's breast cancer risk can be affected by environmental exposures. These may include tobacco smoke and certain chemicals that can mimic estrogen, such as compounds found in some plastics and pesticides.

Air pollution is another area of environmental exposure being studied. A 2025 study published in the American Journal of Public Health found that women living in parts of the United States with poorer air quality – especially neighborhoods with heavy vehicle emissions – had about a 3 percent higher risk of breast cancer. And a 2023 study from the National Institutes of Health found that living in areas with higher levels of particulate air pollution – a mix of tiny solid and liquid particles suspended in the air – was associated with a higher incidence of breast cancer.

Last year, the American Lung Association's State of the Air found that 156 million people – about 46 percent of the U.S. population – live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution.

Other research has examined potential links between breast cancer and Superfund sites. These are abandoned or inactive locations, often former mines, landfills or manufacturing plants, where toxic chemical waste was never properly managed.

A 2025 study conducted by researchers with the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in Miami found an association between breast cancer severity and proximity to Superfund sites. Women who lived near a Superfund site were 27 percent more likely to be diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer than those who lived farther away.

Most research on environmental exposures and breast cancer has found associations rather than clear cause-and-effect relationships, in part because exposures are difficult to measure over long periods and often overlap with other risk factors. Still, some scientists, such as those at the NIH, are looking across a person's lifetime to understand how environmental exposures might interact with genetics. The goal of this effort and other research is to strengthen public health protections and inform policies that reduce harmful exposures – and, ultimately, the burden of breast cancer.

Why does pain last longer for women?

Immune cells may be the culprit

By GEOFFROY LAUMET
Michigan State University
(The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

Pain is something most people experience after an injury, whether from a sprained ankle, surgery or car accident. Normally pain fades as the body heals. But it may last longer in women than in men, making women more likely to develop chronic pain.

For decades, differences in pain between men and women have often been attributed to psychological, emotional or social factors. Because of that, persistent pain in women is often overlooked in care.

However, my research team's newly published study suggests that the immune system may play a role in why recovery from pain differs in men and women. Doctors have thought that the immune system increases pain by causing inflammation, which is often experienced as redness and swelling.

But recent work from my lab and others suggests that immune cells may also be critical to helping pain resolve, and differences in how these cells function between men and women may influence how quickly pain goes away.

Hormones and immune cells

I am a neuroimmunologist who studies how the nervous and immune systems communicate. My research team aims to understand why pain sometimes persists long after an injury has healed, eventually becoming chronic.

To study this process, we combined experiments in mice with data from people who had been involved in motor vehicle collisions. This type of injury is a common trigger for long-term musculoskeletal pain, making it an ideal situation to study how acute pain becomes chronic.

We focused on a specific molecule called interleukin-10 that helps reduce inflammation, measuring its levels in both mice after skin injury and in people in the emergency room after a motor vehicle accident. Surprisingly, we found that IL-10 doesn't just calm inflammation. It also communicates directly to pain-sensing nerve cells to switch them off. In other words, IL-10 helps pain to go away.

Getty Images

We identified that IL-10 was mostly produced by a type of immune cell called monocytes that circulate in the blood and travel to injured tissues.

Across both mice and humans, we found that males tended to recover from pain more quickly than females. The reason appears to lie in how monocytes behave after injury. In males, these immune cells were more likely to produce IL-10, the molecule that helps resolve pain. In females, this response was less pronounced.

Importantly, we also found that testosterone influences how much IL-10 these immune cells produce. Higher levels of testosterone in males promoted higher production of IL-10 by monocytes.

This finding suggests that hormonal signals may shape the body's ability to naturally turn off pain after injury.

Avenues for treatment

Our results point to a shift in how scientists think about pain: Rather than viewing the immune system only as a driver of pain, it may also be a key player in resolving it. Differences in immune cell function could explain why some people recover quicker from injury while others go on to develop chronic pain.

Understanding these biological pathways could eventually lead to new treatments. Instead of simply blocking pain signals, future therapies might aim to boost the body's own pain resolution system. Helping immune cells calm down pain-sensing neurons more effectively could more quickly restore comfort after injury.

While more research is needed, these results highlight a promising new direction in the effort to prevent and treat chronic pain and better understand sex differences in pain.

Geoffroy Laumet is an associate professor of physiology and neuroscience at Michigan State University. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

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Picky eating actually starts in the womb

A nutritional neuroscientist explains how to expand your child's palate

By KATHLEEN KELLER
Penn State (The Conversation)

It's 5:45 p.m. and you've just arrived home after a long day at work. You'd like nothing more than a glass of pinot and to binge old episodes of your favorite show. Into the kitchen comes young Sally, your food-adventurous 8-year-old. "I'm hungry, what's for dinner?"

Sally has never met a food she's afraid to try. Visions of her savoring the tangy brine of an oyster and joyously slurping spicy ramen noodles dance in your head.

Before you can give her an answer, Billy, your 4-year-old picky eater, shouts, "Mac and cheese!" from the living room. Billy rotates between three entrées: macaroni and cheese from a box, chicken nuggets (only dino shaped) and pasta (only spaghetti).

You sigh and wonder how such diverse creatures ended up in the same family.

If this scenario rings a bell, you are not alone. As a nutritional neuroscientist and a parent, I have spent the better part of my professional and personal life thinking about why children eat the foods they do.

Understanding how food preferences develop can help parents teach kids to enjoy a diverse, varied and healthy diet.

Nature vs. nurture?

Are genes to blame in the case of picky eaters like Billy? While genes can have some influence, they often explain only a small part of the story.

People are born liking the taste of sweet and disliking the taste of bitter. These traits are thought to be protective in that they can help drive someone toward sources of calories – which are often sweet, such as fruits or breast milk – and away from potential toxins or poisons, which are often bitter. As an example of these innate preferences, one study found that pregnant moms who consumed sweet carrot capsules had babies who smiled on the ultrasound, while those who ingested bitter kale capsules had babies who grimaced for the camera, suggesting early on their dislike for bitter vegetables.

In addition to these innate responses, there are genes that affect your ability to taste bitter compounds. These compounds, called thioureas, are similar to those found in cruciferous vegetables. People who inherit genes that make them sensitive to these bitter compounds – about 70 percent of the U.S. population – tend to also be more sensitive to other bitter tastes in foods. Because of this, they may dislike foods such as raw broccoli, black coffee and grapefruit.

However, there are plenty of people who develop a liking for bitter foods, even though their first experience with them might have been unpleasant. Case in point, the growing popularity of bitter IPA beers.

Another gene that can influence food preferences is the gene that makes cilantro taste soapy. Those born with a version of this olfactory gene – up to 20 percent of the U.S. population – are sensitive to aldehyde compounds that tend to taste soapy. Because of this taste, they often dislike cilantro.

Pavlov and food preferences

While genes by themselves explain only a small part of taste, a person's interactions with food in the environment are particularly influential when it comes to what they want for dinner.

Ivan Pavlov was a 19th-century experimental physiologist who showed that dogs could be taught to salivate at the sound of a bell. He put them through a conditioning period in which mealtime was repeatedly paired with the sound of a bell. Most pets have some ability to learn to associate environmental cues – such as a food bowl or the sound of their owners' commands – with food.

In the early 1980s, psychologist Leann Birch conducted a series of studies showing that people develop food preferences using a process similar to Pavlov's classical conditioning. When the taste of a food is associated with positive experiences – such as an influx of calories, release of reward chemicals in the brain or the pleasing tones of a mother's voice – these positive experiences can enhance how much a person likes a food. On the other side of the coin, negative experiences, such as a painful stomachache or a punishment associated with eating a food – "You have to eat all of your vegetables or no screen time!"– can often decrease how much someone likes a food.

Babies even begin learning about food before they are born. In a classic study by biopsychologist Julie Mennella, pregnant moms who drank carrot juice four days a week during their pregnancy or while breastfeeding had babies who were more accepting of carrot-flavored cereal when it was first presented to them. Flavors that are passed through amniotic fluid to the developing fetus prime the future baby to accept the cuisine of the family.

Hope for picky eaters

The good news is that for most children, picky eating is a phase that tends to decline as they reach school age. And if children are growing at a healthy pace, it's often not something to be too concerned about.

For parents who want to help their kids expand their palates, the most important thing you can do is give your child repeated opportunities to taste foods without pressuring or coercing them. Some children need 12 or more taste experiences with a new food before they will accept it. Some children will also be open to trying foods at school or day care, even if they won't try them in front of you.

As for Sally and Billy, you've managed to get dinner on the table right on time. Your latest invention: kimchi mac and cheese and baked cauliflower, with extra Sriracha for Sally. You're hoping the familiar shape of the boxed mac and cheese noodle might tempt Billy into taking a bite. And if not, there's always tomorrow.

Kathleen Keller is a professor of nutritional sciences at Penn State. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

Dreamstime / TNS

Atrial fibrillation occurs when the heart's upper chambers beat in a fast, irregular way, which can cause symptoms such as palpitations, fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness and/or reduced ability to exercise.

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

What is pulsed field ablation?

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I have atrial fibrillation, and I've heard there's a new kind of ablation that could relieve my symptoms. Can you tell me about it?

ANSWER: If you have atrial fibrillation (AFib), you're not alone – it's the most common heart rhythm disorder, affecting millions around the world. AFib occurs when the heart's upper chambers beat in a fast, irregular way, which can cause symptoms such as palpitations, fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness and/or reduced ability to exercise.

For many people, medications can help control symptoms. But when drugs don't work well, cause side effects, or people opt out of that treatment, a procedure called catheter ablation may be another avenue for certain patients.

Catheter ablation is a minimally invasive procedure used to treat abnormal heart rhythms such as AFib. During the procedure, doctors guide thin, flexible tubes, called catheters, through blood vessels in the groin up to and into your heart.

For AFib ablation, patients are put under anesthesia, and depending on the complexity of the rhythms, the procedure can take several hours. The treatment usually focuses on ablation of muscle tissue that can generate electrical signals and trigger AFib.

This muscle tissue is found inside the pulmonary veins, which drain blood from the lungs into the left upper chamber of the heart, called the left atrium. By destroying these small areas of the heart, the main electrical impulses that set off AFib are isolated from the rest of the heart.

Using advanced imaging tools such as X-ray, ultrasound and catheters, doctors can reconstruct a 3D rendering of the heart while it's beating in real time and locate areas of heart tissue that are triggering AFib. This provides a roadmap for pinpointing the areas that are causing AFib. Energy is then delivered through the catheter to disrupt those problem areas, helping the heart maintain a normal rhythm.

For the past 20 years, most AFib ablations have used thermal energy to destroy targeted tissue using:

- Heat (radiofrequency ablation)
- Extreme cold (cryoablation)

These approaches can be effective, but they carry risks because heat or cold can unintentionally cause serious and even life-threatening damage to nearby structures, including:

- Injury to the esophagus
- Narrowing of the pulmonary veins
- Damage to the phrenic nerve, which controls the diaphragm and breathing

In recent years, a newer form of ablation – called pulsed field ablation (PFA) – has emerged and is generating excitement among heart rhythm specialists and patients.

PFA works in a completely different way. Instead of heat or cold, it uses very brief, high-voltage electrical pulses that last only microseconds. Because PFA is relatively nonthermal, the risks of thermal ablation appear to be dramatically reduced.

The electrical pulses delivered by the catheter create tiny openings in the membranes of heart muscle cells – a process called electroporation. These openings cause targeted cells to stop functioning, eventually die and become scar tissue.

One of the biggest advantages of PFA is the ability to selectively disable cardiac cells.

Another benefit is the efficiency of the procedure. PFA procedures are typically faster, meaning less time under general anesthesia, which may be especially important for older adults or people with other medical conditions.

So far, studies suggest that PFA is as effective as traditional ablation techniques. About 65 percent to 75 percent of patients remain free of AFib one year after a single procedure without antiarrhythmic medications. Success rates may improve with repeated procedures, continued medication use and other factors.

Ablation isn't a cure for AFib, and sometimes more ablations aren't always better or the best option. Too much scar tissue in the heart can cause a different set of problems, which is why careful patient selection is essential when weighing the risks and benefits of ablation.

The goal is to relieve symptoms, reduce frequency and duration of episodes, and improve the patient's quality of life.

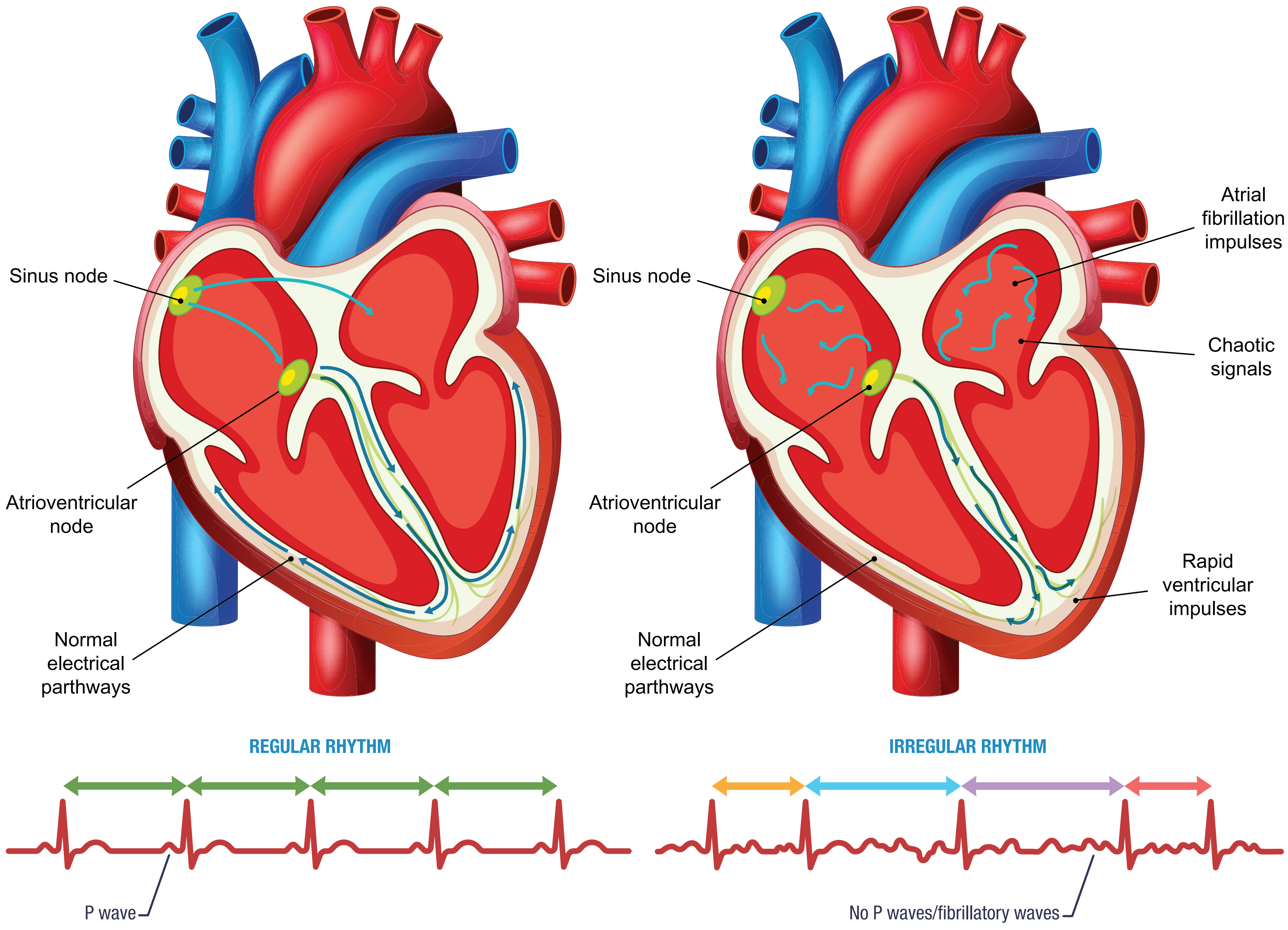
While promising, PFA is still relatively new. Rare complications include coronary artery spasm; small bubble formation, which can lead to a stroke; or kidney injury. These events aren't common, and their causes continue to be studied.

PFA may expand treatment options for many people with AFib, particularly those with certain conditions where prolonged anesthesia time poses more risk. Whether it's appropriate depends on your type of AFib, symptoms, overall health, prior treatments, modification of risk factors and the goal for AFib treatment.

Talk with a cardiologist or cardiac electrophysiologist to determine whether PFA fits into your personalized treatment plan.

– Christopher DeSimone, M.D., Ph.D., Cardiovascular Medicine, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION



FINANCE

How to save money: *14 easy tips*

By KAREN BENNETT
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Saving money in the current economic environment likely feels overwhelming. And the data supports how much of a struggle it is – have enough emergency savings to cover three months of expenses, according to Bankrate's Emergency Savings Report. With 24 percent having no emergency savings at all, finding ways to cut expenses and build savings has become essential for financial security.

The challenge isn't just about earning more – it's also about saving smarter. Even small changes to your spending habits can add up to significant savings over time. Whether you're building your first emergency fund or trying to reach a specific savings goal, these proven strategies can help you keep more money in your pocket.

1. Review your spending habits

Before implementing any money-saving strategies, you need a clear picture of where your money currently goes. Most banks and credit card companies provide categorized spending reports through their online platforms or mobile apps, showing you exactly how much you're spending on groceries, entertainment, utilities and other categories.

■ Track everything for at least one month: Review bank statements, credit card bills and cash receipts to understand your spending patterns. Many people are surprised to discover they're spending far more than expected on subscription services, dining out or impulse purchases.

■ Identify spending leaks: Look for recurring charges you forgot about, subscriptions you no longer use or categories where you're consistently overspending. Common culprits include streaming services, gym memberships and automatic renewals for apps or software you rarely use.

2. Automate your savings

Setting up automatic transfers from your checking to your savings account each payday removes the temptation to spend money before saving it. This "pay yourself first" approach ensures consistent saving without requiring ongoing willpower or decision making.

First, calculate your monthly expenses and determine how much you can realistically save each month. Consider automatically transferring a percentage of each paycheck – such as 10 percent or 20 percent – rather than a fixed dollar amount. This approach scales your savings as your income fluctuates and helps build the habit of living below your means.

Many budgeting apps can track spending, issue overspending alerts and automate savings transfers. Apps like YNAB (You Need A Budget) and Rocket Money can help coordinate your spending and saving goals in one platform.

3. Use cash-back apps and credit card rewards

Cash-back apps can reduce your overall spending on purchases you're already making. These tools work best when used strategically for planned purchases rather than encouraging additional spending.

If you pay off credit card balances in full each month, cash back credit cards can provide 1 percent to 6 percent back on purchases. Stack cash-back apps with rewards credit cards for double savings.

4. Reconsider your mobile provider

Cell phone plans often include features and data allowances far beyond most users' actual needs. With increased competition among mobile providers, switching carriers can provide significant monthly savings without sacrificing service.

Companies like Mint Mobile, Visible and Ting Mobile are known for offering plans that are cheaper than major carriers while using the same cellular networks. It pays to research coverage in your area and compare plan features to find the best value. Plus, check your phone's data usage statistics to determine how much data you actually use monthly. If you primarily use Wi-Fi at home and work, you may be paying for more data than necessary.

If multiple family members need service, family plans from both major and smaller carriers often provide better per-line pricing than individual plans. But before switching, call your current carrier to discuss potentially lowering your monthly bill. Many providers offer retention discounts to customers considering switching to competitors.

5. Turn off store promotion notifications

Your smartphone can be a powerful money-saving tool, but it can also trigger impulse purchases through promotional notifications, deal alerts and targeted advertising. Taking control of these digital spending triggers can significantly reduce unplanned purchases. This includes:

■ Unsubscribe from promotional emails.

■ Disable app notifications.

■ Remove shopping apps from your phone.

6. Shrink your utility bills

Home utility costs continue rising, but several changes can reduce your monthly bills without significantly impacting your comfort or convenience:

■ LED lighting savings: The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that switching to LED bulbs can save the average household around $225 annually.

■ Seal air leaks: You can save up to 20 percent on heating and cooling costs by sealing air leaks and adding insulation. Many utility companies offer free energy audits to identify the most impactful improvements for your home.

■ Smart thermostat benefits: Programmable and smart thermostats can reduce heating and cooling costs by automatically adjusting temperatures when you're away from home.

■ Water conservation: Installing low-flow showerheads, fixing leaks promptly, and watering lawns during cooler morning hours can significantly reduce water bills.

■ Energy assistance programs: The federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps eligible households pay energy bills, weatherize homes and make energy-related repairs. Check your local utility companies for additional rebate programs.

7. Evaluate your entertainment expenses

Entertainment subscriptions can quickly add up to $100 or more monthly. Regularly reviewing and optimizing these services can free up significant money for savings.

Instead of paying for multiple streaming services simultaneously, consider rotating subscriptions monthly or seasonally. Services like Sling TV, Hulu and Fubo often cost less than traditional cable packages while offering access to popular content. If you're already an Amazon Prime member, take advantage of the included Prime Video streaming service and Prime Music to potentially eliminate other subscription costs.

Public libraries offer free access to more than just physical books. You may be able to use your local library to check out movies, music, audiobooks and digital content through apps like Libby.

8. Take advantage of free local attractions

A little research can help you find fun, affordable attractions and activities in your local area. For instance, some museums and art galleries offer free admission on certain days of the week or month. Libraries may offer passes to parks, zoos or museums on a first-come, first-served basis. Or you can just head outdoors for a hike, bike ride or picnic.

Your bank may even offer free access to attractions. For example, Bank of America's Museums on Us program gives the bank's debit and credit card holders complimentary access to around 240 cultural institutions across the country.

9. Be a strategic grocery shopper

While you'll need to keep buying food despite higher prices, you can learn how to save money on groceries. One method is to avoid throwing away unused food. For a U.S. household of four, the annual cost of food waste is around $2,913, or $56 per week, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

AAs you make your grocery list, think about what you threw away last time and how to avoid letting that happen again. Planning out your upcoming meals can help you avoid buying things you don't need – and avoid waste, in turn. Also, take a tour of your pantry first and build your meals around what you already bought.

10. Break up with brand names

Speaking of groceries, consider whether you really need to pay for expensive brand-name foods. A comparison of ingredients and labels on things like noodles, cereal and spices may show generic alternatives to be just as nutritious and high-quality as their top-shelf counterparts.

The same concept can apply to non-food items such as paper products, hand soap and laundry detergent. Try to find more affordable alternatives for any such brand-name household items you buy. You can always switch back to your original choice if you're not happy with the lower-priced alternative.

11. Explore other banking options

Banking fees can drain hundreds of dollars annually from your accounts. Shopping for better banking options can eliminate these unnecessary costs:

■ Monthly maintenance fee waivers: Online banks like Ally Bank and Marcus by Goldman Sachs typically don't charge monthly maintenance fees on checking or savings accounts. They also frequently offer higher interest rates than traditional banks.

■ High-yield savings benefits: Online high-yield savings accounts currently offer rates around 4.00 percent APY, compared to the national average of 0.61 percent. Moving $10,000 from a traditional savings account to a high-yield account could earn an additional $300 or more annually.

■ ATM fee reimbursements: Many online banks and credit unions reimburse ATM fees charged by other banks, potentially saving $5 to $15 monthly for frequent ATM users.

■ CD and money market options: If you have funds you won't need for several months or years, certificates of deposit (CDs) and money market accounts from online institutions often provide significantly higher returns than traditional savings accounts.

12. Compare car insurance rates

If you have a track record of safe driving, it can pay to shop around for a good insurance provider that will reward you for your responsible behavior. Compare other car insurance quotes with what you currently pay to see how much you can lower your premiums for the same amount of coverage.

Those who don't spend much time behind the wheel may be able to cut costs by going with usage-based insurance, which can tailor your coverage to fit how much you actually use your vehicle.

13. Use coupons and promotional codes

Couponing might sound old-school, but finding deals doesn't always require clipping portions of the Sunday newspaper. When you're shopping online, take a few minutes to search for a coupon code when websites offer a "promo code" box on the checkout page.

Browser extensions like Rakuten and Coupert automatically search for online coupons while you shop. Capital One Shopping is another tool that can find online deals automatically, and it's available to everyone – not just Capital One customers. It works by searching for coupon codes, best prices and rewards at more than 100,000 online retailers.

14. Challenge yourself to a spending freeze

Try taking control of your finances by embarking on a spending freeze – also known as a no-buy challenge – during which you cut all unnecessary spending for a set period. This could give you a sense of how much you're spending on nonessentials like trips to the coffee shop. Add the extra money you have at the end of the month to your savings or use it to pay down debt.

Bottom line

If you're serious about reaching your financial goals, our 14 tips on saving money offer you a good starting point. Now that you have a basic understanding of how to save money, it's a good idea to plan where you'll allocate your savings – and put your plan into action.

For example, if you want to bulk up your emergency fund, transfer any savings out of your checking account each week or month so you're less likely to spend it. If you need to pay down debt, create additional payments that automatically come out of your bank account. Whatever your goals, make the process of saving as effortless as possible.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.

FOOD

Cooking without meat can be fun and flavorful

By NICOLE HVIDSTEN
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

People choose to eat less meat for a variety of reasons, from religious and cultural to health benefits. But don't forget: Meat-free dishes taste good, too.

With a run of springlike weather and the beginning of Lent, now is a great time to try a new batch of recipes that are lighter in preparation but not in flavor. (We're following the Lenten rule and allowing fish.)

Give tuna salad a mayo-free makeover by infusing the pantry staple with Southwestern flavors and serving it on a tostada. Or combine a can of oil-packed tuna with vegetables, olives and hard-boiled eggs, then stuff them into empanadas for a portable Spanish-inspired meal.

Marinate salmon in an Asian sauce before mixing it up with noodles, baby bok choy and peanuts. Try your hand at salmon escabeche, a traditional Spanish preparation that's ceviche-adjacent, and serve it atop a bed of fresh greens for a lighter meal that evokes warmer weather.

Or try a pasta dish that gets its protein from walnuts, funk from Gorgonzola and a side of bitterness from radicchio. It's a flavor powerhouse.

As a bonus, tuna, salmon and walnuts are all high in protein and omega-3s, adding a nutrient boost as well as a flavor boost. The recipes are also malleable – swap in other proteins, cheeses, spices and vegetables to keep it fresh. You'll want to keep them in your rotation all year long.

Dreamstime / TNS

Grilled salmon steaks seasoned with herbs.

Tuna Salad Tostada

Serves 4 to 5

From the new Native cookbook "Rooted in Fire" by Pyet Despain, who writes: "I did not have access to fresh tuna in the Midwest, or any other type of fresh fish; in our low-income family, fish was considered a luxury and not a mainstay of our diet. Nevertheless, there wasn't a week where we didn't reach into the cabinet for a can of tuna to make Tuna Helper. ... Our tuna salad didn't involve celery or mayo. We'd drain a can of tuna, scrape the fatty flakes into a bowl, add some pico de gallo, put it on a few crackers with a dash of Tapatío, and call it a day. I still reach for this salad today." (HarperOne, 2025).

1 lb. fresh tuna (or canned tuna, drained and shredded with a fork)
¼ medium white onion, diced
1 c. diced tomato
1 c. diced red bell pepper
1 c. cilantro leaves
1 tsp. sesame seeds
Juice of 2 limes
½ tsp. sea salt, plus more for salting the fish
1 tsp. chipotle powder
Tostadas, for serving
2 to 3 avocados, thinly sliced
Chili oil, for serving, optional

If using fresh tuna, salt it. In a medium skillet over medium heat, sear the fresh tuna for 4 minutes on each side until it is no longer pink. Remove the skillet from the heat, and let the fish cool to room temperature. Shred it with a fork.

In a medium bowl, combine the onion, tomato, red bell pepper, cilantro, sesame seeds, lime juice, salt and chipotle powder. Mix well, and add the shredded fresh or canned tuna.

Serve with tostadas, avocado slices and a sprinkle of chili oil, if desired.

Salmon Escabeche

Serves 4

Escabeche is a traditional Spanish dish that originated in Persia, where fish or seafood is cooked or pickled in an acidic sauce. The tangy, bright flavors of the marinade perfectly balance the richness of the fish or seafood. It can be served chilled or at room temperature, but be sure to start it the day before; it needs at least 12 hours to marinate. From "Tapas Espana: 70 Easy Recipes for Gathering and Sharing," by Catherine Cogliandro Alioto (Weldon Owen, 2026).

1 lb. wild-caught salmon fillet, cut crosswise into 1-in.-wide slices
1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. freshly ground pepper
1 shallot, thinly sliced
1/2 fennel bulb, trimmed and thinly sliced
4 sprigs fresh parsley, coarsely chopped
1/4 c. extra-virgin olive oil
2/3 c. dry white wine, such as Albarino
4 c. mixed greens
2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh tarragon, for garnish

In a glass dish, place the salmon slices and season well with salt and pepper. Add the shallot, fennel and parsley.

In a small saucepan, heat the oil and wine over medium-high heat and boil for 1 minute. Immediately remove from heat and pour the mixture over the salmon. Cover and set aside until cool. Transfer to the refrigerator and let the salmon marinate for at least 12 hours.

To serve, gently toss the greens with the vinaigrette from the marinade. Place the salmon pieces on top of the greens. Garnish with tarragon and serve.

Salmon Satay Noodles

Serves 2

You can swap the salmon for prawns, chicken or pork tenderloin, or use any sort of noodles you wish. To get ahead, make the dual-purpose satay sauce/marinade the day before or in the morning. From "Clodagh's Happy Cooking," by Clodagh McKenna (Kyle, 2026).

FOR THE SAUCE:
2/3 c. (5 1/2 oz.) soy sauce
Finely grated zest and juice of 2 limes
1/2 c. (4 oz.) toasted sesame oil
2 tbsp. honey
2 tbsp. rice wine vinegar
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 (2-in.) piece of ginger root,peeled and finely sliced or grated
2 tbsp. hoisin sauce
2 tbsp. peanut butter, preferably smooth
2 tbsp. water
FOR THE NOODLES:
2 salmon fillets with skins
2 tsp. olive oil
2 egg noodle nests
1 large red pepper, finely sliced
2 heads of baby bok choy, halved
1 tbsp. chopped roasted peanuts
1 green onion, finely sliced
1 tbsp. chopped cilantro leaves
1 lime, halved, for serving

To make the satay sauce: Place all the ingredients in a blender, or use an immersion blender, and blitz until you reach a smooth consistency.

To make the salmon: Place the salmon fillets in a bowl, pour over half the sauce and turn to coat all over. Cover and place in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

Set a frying pan over medium heat and add the olive oil. Remove the salmon fillets from the marinade, shaking off the excess, and place them in the hot pan, skin-side down. Sear for 5 minutes, or until the skin has browned, then turn and cook until opaque, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer the salmon to a plate, cover and allow to rest.

Cook the noodles according to the package instructions, then drain and set aside.

Add the red pepper and bok choy to the frying pan and cook, stirring constantly, for 2 to 3 minutes, or until crisp-tender. Add the rest of the satay sauce to the frying pan and heat through. Finally, tip in the noodles and toss to coat with the sauce.

Distribute the noodles and vegetables between warmed bowls and top with a salmon fillet. Sprinkle with peanuts, green onion and cilantro and serve with lime halves.

Strozzapreti with Radicchio, Walnuts and Gorgonzola

Serves 4 to 6

This recipe can only be made better by using local products. But to take this dish to the next level, drizzle some aged balsamic on top. From " The Pasta Book," by Marc Vetri (Clarkson Potter, 2026).

Kosher salt, to taste
12 oz. strozzapreti (see Tip)
10 tbsp. (5 oz.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1/3 c. extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium heads Treviso or the more common Chioggia radicchio, cut into ribbons 1/2 in. wide
2 cloves garlic, peeled
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Leaves from 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, chopped if large
1/2 tsp. red wine vinegar, plus more as needed
1/2 c. finely grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
6 tbsp. chopped toasted walnuts, preferably black walnuts, plus more for garnish
3/4 c. crumbled Gorgonzola cheese

Cook the strozzapreti: Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add salt until it tastes like well-seasoned broth. Drop in the strozzapreti, give it a stir, and cover the pot to quickly return the water to a boil. Uncover or partially cover to maintain the boil and boil the pasta, stirring occasionally, until it is tender but still a little chewy when bitten, 10 to 12 minutes.

Meanwhile, start the sauce: In a deep 12-inch sauté pan, melt the butter and olive oil over medium heat. Add the radicchio and garlic and sauté, stirring now and then, until the radicchio is tender, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. If the pasta isn't ready yet, remove the pan from the heat.

When the pasta is ready, return the pan with the radicchio to high heat and add 1 cup of the hot pasta water and the rosemary. Bring to a simmer and use a spider strainer or large slotted spoon to scoop the cooked pasta from the water and transfer it straight to the pan. Shake and swirl the pan until the sauce reduces a bit more and begins to hug the pasta, 1 to 2 minutes (keep the pasta moving, adding a little more pasta water if necessary to create a loose, creamy sauce). Taste the sauce and season with the red wine vinegar, adding more to taste. Toss everything until the pasta and sauce begin to marry.

Remove from the heat, add the Parmesan and toasted walnuts, and keep tossing until the sauce thickens further and the pasta and sauce marry, leaving little to no sauce in the pan. Remove the garlic cloves before serving.

Dish out the pasta in mounds onto warmed plates. Garnish with the Gorgonzola, some more toasted walnuts and some Parmesan.

Tip: Strozzapreti is a hand-rolled pasta that looks like a short, twisted rope. Feel free to substitute a pasta with a similar shape, or more common shapes like penne, fusilli or campanelle.

Galician Empanadas

Makes 4 empanadas

The Galician empanada is distinguished by its shape and filling. Traditionally made as one large, round pie with crimped edges, this empanada is filled with tuna and a sofrito of vegetables; it is cooked whole and served in wedges. Alternatively, as we do here, the empanada can be cooked in individual round tartlet pans. From "Tapas Espana: 70 Easy Recipes for Gathering and Sharing," by Catherine Cogliandro Alioto (Weldon Owen, 2026).

FOR THE PASTRY:
2 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. kosher salt
1 c. (2 sticks) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1/2 c. ice-cold water
FOR THE SOFRITO:
3 tbsp. olive oil
1 onion, diced
1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
3 Roma tomatoes, chopped
1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1/2 tsp. freshly ground pepper
1 (5-oz.) can tuna, packed in oil, drained and flaked
1/4 c. green olives, pitted and coarsely chopped
1 hard-boiled egg, sliced
2 tbsp. fresh parsley, chopped
2 tsp. smoked paprika
1 large egg
1 tbsp. cream

TO MAKE THE PASTRY: Combine the flour, salt and butter in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Process the mixture for about 10 seconds, or until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. With the motor running, slowly drizzle in the water until the dough starts to come together, about 30 seconds. Turn the dough onto a board and shape it into two equal rounds. Wrap each in plastic and chill for at least 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

TO MAKE THE SOFRITO: Warm the oil in a large sauté pan or skillet over medium-low heat and add the onion, bell pepper and garlic. Cook for 3 to 5 minutes until translucent. Add the tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Continue to cook for 5 minutes until the tomatoes release their juices. Set aside to cool.

Once cool, in a large bowl, combine the sofrito with the tuna, olives, hard-boiled egg, parsley and paprika. Stir gently to combine. In a small bowl, whisk together the raw egg and cream.

Roll out the dough and cut out eight 3-inch rounds. Press four of the rounds into the bottom of four tartlet molds. Divide the vegetables and tuna mixture among the molds and top each with another round of dough. Seal the edges and, using a paring knife, make two small vents in the top of each empanada. Brush the empanadas with the egg wash. Place the tartlets on a baking sheet and bake for 30 minutes until golden brown.

Store wrapped or in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

Remembering when the Beach Boys had their own Santa Monica clubhouse

By MIKAEL WOOD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Photos from ZUMA Press

The Beach Boys.

LOS ANGELES — Today it's an Italianate apartment building wedged between an Indian restaurant and a Target. But what stood half a century ago at 1454 5th Street in downtown Santa Monica was the Beach Boys' Brother Studio, a former porn theater turned recording complex where the preeminent American rock band of the 1960s sought to coax its resident genius, Brian Wilson, back into the fold after a long stretch in the wilderness.

Nobody would consider the albums the Beach Boys made at Brother in the mid-70s – among them "15 Big Ones," "The Beach Boys Love You" and the long-shelved "Adult/Child" – the band's most successful. (Well, nobody except for Wilson, who frequently cited the synthed-up "Love You" as his fave.) A decade after 1966's "Pet Sounds," which so blew the Beatles away that they had to answer with "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," the burly, bearded Beach Boys were far from the center of pop music; Wilson, in particular, had largely withdrawn from public life as he struggled with the effects of drugs and his fragile mental health.

Yet Brother offered the setting for a creative reflowering – arguably the band's final moment of unity before the start of years of more serious infighting.

"It was like we all got back together and became Beach Boys again," says Al Jardine, who founded the group in suburban Hawthorne in 1961 with Wilson, Wilson's brothers Dennis and Carl and the Wilsons' cousin Mike Love. Now, eight months after Brian Wilson's death in June at age 82, a new box set looks back at the era as an expressive outpouring led by the band's rejuvenated visionary.

"We Gotta Groove: The Brother Studio Years" collects 73 tracks from 1976 and '77, including outtakes, demos, a remastered version of the "Love You" LP and the first official release of the widely bootlegged "Adult/Child," which puts Wilson's touchingly emotive singing amid orchestral arrangements in a glossy big-band style. Among the set's highlights are a voice-and-piano rendition of "Still I Dream of It," which, according to legend, Wilson wrote in the hopes that Frank Sinatra would perform it, and a majestic take on "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" that shows how brilliant a record-maker Wilson remained despite all the well-documented turmoil.

"Brian was healing from his personal life, and he was ready to go in the studio again," says Jardine, 83, whose latest tour with the members of Wilson's road band recently stopped in L.A. for a complete performance of "The Beach Boys Love You." With quirky but heartfelt tunes about Wilson's daughter Carnie ("I Wanna Pick You Up") and Johnny Carson (uh, "Johnny Carson") – not to mention the propulsive "Honkin' Down the Highway," on which Jardine sang lead – "Love You" has become something of a cult classic among Wilsonologists.

Says Jardine of the LP: "Brian's spirit – his songwriting soul – is really strong on that one."

The Beach Boys opened Brother Studio around 1974 near the corner of 5th Street and Broadway, just a few blocks from the beach. They'd traveled to the Netherlands to record their most recent album, "Holland"; before that, they cut several records at Wilson's home on Bellagio Road in Bel-Air, though the group's erstwhile mastermind spent as much time upstairs in his bedroom as he did recording music with his bandmates.

Wilson's retreat after the flameout of his notoriously ambitious "Smile" project made space for the other Beach Boys to shape the band's music, as on 1970's fondly remembered "Sunflower." But the lack of hits eventually took its toll: With a laugh, Love, 84, says one reason they started up Brother was that Wilson's wife, Marilyn, eventually "threw in the towel after years of having her house flooded with people" to less-than-spectacular returns. "It was sort of like a self-preservation thing," he adds.

In "We Gotta Groove's" liner notes, engineer Stephen Moffitt, who designed Brother after working earlier at L.A.'s Village Recorders, recalls clearing out "all the porn crap" from the building and installing a circular stained-glass window to establish the right vibe. A vintage magazine ad boasts of the studio's high-end gear as well as its "large screen video lounge" and "a playroom with pong, pinball and bumper pool."

"It was a respite," Love says. "A place to go and be creative."

Just as the band was getting Brother up and running, the Beach Boys scored an unexpected smash with 1974's "Endless Summer," a double-LP compilation of the group's early material – "Surfin' Safari," "Don't Worry Baby," "California Girls" – that topped the Billboard album chart on its way to sales of more than 3 million copies. A similar hits collection issued in the U.K., "20 Golden Greats," did just as well there. "An enormous success," says Love. "One in every five families had it."

Suddenly, having more or less ignored group-minded efforts like "Holland" and "Carl and the Passions – 'So Tough,' " the world remembered what it loved about the Beach Boys, and that was songs written and produced by Brian Wilson.

The band got to work at Brother recording "15 Big Ones," which featured a mix of Wilson originals and covers of oldies like "Chapel of Love" and "Blueberry Hill." The first Beach Boys album since "Pet Sounds" to carry a solo production credit for Wilson, it came accompanied by an aggressive marketing campaign known as "Brian Is Back!"; Wilson appeared on the cover of Rolling Stone – "The Healing of Brother Brian," the cover line read – and took part in a Beach Boys television special that showed his return to the concert stage at Anaheim Stadium.

Earle Mankey, an engineer at Brother in the mid-70s, says "15 Big Ones" was less Wilson's attempt to relight the flame than it was "everyone else's attempt to relight the flame." He recalls Wilson looking like a "scared rabbit" when he walked into the studio to find some of the session musicians who'd worked with the Beach Boys back in the old days. (This was the time of Wilson's first dalliance with the psychologist Eugene Landy, who would reenter Wilson's life to much controversy in the early '80s.)

Even Love admits that "Brian Is Back!" was a little overblown. "Brian was back to some degree," Love says now. "One hundred percent? Perhaps not."

Yet the campaign worked: "15 Big Ones" went to No. 8 on the Billboard 200 – the highest for a Beach Boys studio album in more than a decade – while the LP spun off the band's first Top 5 single since "Good Vibrations" with a rendition of Chuck Berry's "Roll and Roll Music."

More important, the commercial success set up Wilson for a true artistic comeback with "The Beach Boys Love You," which can still startle you with the purity of its emotion and the strange textures of Wilson's production. Check out the beautifully lopsided groove of "Mona," which Dennis sings with a bleary smoker's rasp, or the lonely-sounding electric-guitar lick floating over the Wilson brothers' harmonies in "The Night Was So Young"; listen to Brian and Marilyn trading marital assurances in their almost painfully guileless duet, "Let's Put Our Hearts Together."

"Of all Brian's stuff, I'd say it's his most personal album after 'Pet Sounds,'" says Darian Sahanaja, who played with Wilson for the last couple of decades of his life. "Maybe even more than 'Pet Sounds,' because Tony Asher wrote most of the lyrics on 'Pet Sounds' and Brian wrote most of the lyrics on 'Love You.' The Brian that I knew is very much living and breathing in these songs."

Unlike "15 Big Ones," "Love You" was not a hit, peaking at No. 53 – even lower than "Holland." As much as he adores the album, Sahanaja finds it amusing that anyone in the Beach Boys' camp might have expected Wilson to try to give rock fans what they wanted.

"He wasn't listening to the Top 40 at the time," he says. "He just wrote whatever came out of him. There was no, 'I wonder what Fleetwood Mac's up to…'"

Indeed, Wilson went even further out with "Adult/Child," for which he commissioned orchestral arrangements by Dick Reynolds, who'd worked in the '50s with Wilson's beloved Four Freshmen. Both Love and Jardine say they can't quite remember why the album didn't come out; Love says "it may not have suited the record company at the time" and points out that even "Pet Sounds" got the group's A&R rep wondering "if maybe we could do something more like 'I Get Around.'"

Whatever the case, "Adult/Child's" mothballing led to another withdrawal by Wilson, who had far less to do with the band's next few records and who eventually turned to a solo career. In 2012, Wilson produced a so-so Beach Boys reunion record – minus Dennis, who died in 1983, and Carl, who died in 1998 – but for much of the '00s he and Jardine toured under Wilson's name while Love toured as the Beach Boys. (Love's band will play three shows at the Hollywood Bowl in July.)

Asked what it's been like performing with Wilson's band since his death, Jardine says, "I just feel like he's still around." Sahanaja says he's seen Jardine tear up as they've been working up songs from "Love You" on the road ahead. But he's also been gratified to see the excitement among younger fans regarding what he views as the Beach Boys' last great album.

"The reaction has been more insane than I've ever seen for any of the shows we ever did with Brian," he says. "It's like they feel they found this secret thing that they really identify with." He laughs. "I'm telling you, these kids are freaking out – jumping up and down, singing along to all the words. They're, like, pogo-ing."

MOVIE REVIEW

Disney / Pixar / TNS

King George (voiced by Bobby Moynihan), left, and Mabel Beaver (voiced by Piper Curda) in Disney and Pixar's "Hoppers."

Nature goes wild in *'Hoppers'*

By MARK MESZOROS
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio) (TNS)

'Hoppers" isn't afraid to get a bit weird, the latest offering from Disney-owned Pixar Animation Studios sporting an irreverent streak we've not seen in a while from a major-studio animated release.

This colorful, nature-forward adventure directed by Daniel Chong and penned by Jesse Andrews tells a tale of humans using a highly advanced technology – "hopping" – to transfer their consciousnesses into lifelike animal robot bodies to communicate with those on four limbs. That tech brings them and, by extension, us into a very colorful world.

The human who spends the most time among the critters – as, if you will, a beaver-bot – is 19-year-old animal lover, environmental crusader and Beaverton resident Mabel Tanaka (voiced by Piper Curda), a memorable character and the hard-beating heart of "Hoppers."

The film begins by introducing us to a younger version of Mabel (Lila Liu), in the middle of what is only her latest attempt to leave school with a backpack stuffed with class pets she intends to set free. When faculty members try to apprehend her, she resists, leading to an adult's hand being bitten and the sprinkler system being activated.

She is, understandably, in hot water at school and with her mom.

She receives solace from her grandmother (Karen Huie), who shows Mabel her favorite nearby slice of natural beauty, a tranquil glade where the animals, given time, reveal themselves.

The viewer then braces for emotional impact as "Hoppers" serves up what feels like an "Up"-esque montage that features the two Tanaka females spending time there over the years. But while it ends as you feared it would, rest assured that while it is effective, it is not soul-crushingly devastating.

Now a student at Beaverton University who isn't above skipping class to defend the environment, the skateboarding Mabel is pouring all her energy into stopping Mayor Jerry Generazzo (Jon Hamm) from building a highway that will run through the glade.

Legally, Jerry is free to move forward with the project because all animal life has seemingly vacated the glade. (How suspiciously lucky!)

> **'Hoppers'**
>
> ★★★
>
> **MPA rating:** PG (for action/peril, some scary images and mild language)
>
> **Running time:** 1:45
>
> **How to watch:** In theaters

When Mabel learns her biology professor, Dr. Samantha "Sam" Fairfax (Kathy Najimy) has developed the Hoppers program, she helps herself to the tech to investigate the situation on the ground level.

Hoping to rally the animals to her cause, she quickly learns they have relocated to a now-overcrowded pond, ruled by King George (Bobby Moynihan), a benevolent beaver who has instituted "pond rules," which state both that you watch the back of another animal but also that when you gotta eat, you gotta eat.

Completely fooled, George is immediately impressed by Mabel Beaver and quickly comes to rely on her, eventually bestowing on her an important (and "Game of Thrones"-inspired) designation.

However, in her zeal to stop Jerry, she unintentionally makes him a target of the larger animal world, after a council meeting involving the Bird King (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), the Amphibian King (Steve Purcell), the Fish Queen (Ego Nwodim), the Reptile Queen (Nichole Sakura), the Insect Queen (Meryl Streep) and her maniacal son, Titus (eventually voiced by a memorable Dave Franco).

Meanwhile, Dr. Sam, along with colleagues Nisha (Aparna Nancherla) and Conner (Sam Richardson) are desperately trying to convince Mabel to return to her human form – before it's too late.

Chong, who joined Pixar as a story artist in 2009, and Andrews, who co-wrote Pixar's "Luca" (2021), share credit for the story. They've crafted a narrative that, while putting the wild in "wilderness" – expect a flying shark named Diane (Vanessa Bayer) before the action concludes – never forgets that the heart comes first with a movie like this one.

Yet, note that while this movie has some valuable messages for the young viewer, especially when it comes to the environment, the PG-rated "Hoppers" may simply be too intense at times for a little one. Let's just say things get pretty hot and, well, downright Frankenstein-y as Mabel and friends desperately try to save the day.

If the kids can handle the heat, though, they're likely to love "Hoppers."

It benefits from strong voice work from Curda (Disney Channel endeavors "A.N.T. Farm," "I Didn't Do It" and "Teen Beach 2"), Hamm ("Mad Men," "Your Friends and Neighbors") and the ensemble as a whole.

Like most of what Pixar has put out in recent years, this doesn't reside with its best work – "Toy Story," "Finding Nemo," "The Incredibles," the aforementioned "Up," etc. – but it sits comfortably in that next, altogether respectable tier.

If nothing else, it's a nice warmup for "Toy Story

SERIES REVIEW

'R.J. Decker' and *'Young Sherlock'* offer tales of prisoner-to-PI

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Although the airwaves are packed with officers of the law and their sometimes amateur assistants, you don't see much in the way of private eyes these days, the Sam Spades and Jim Rockfords, to whom clients come for help and who charge such and such per plus expenses. There is possibly something to be said about what the balance of cops versus PIs on TV says about the national mood, or whether we're putting our faith in institutions or individuals, if one had the research grant. But the more immediate question is whether a show holds your attention and rewards your time.

Two such series begin this week. One, "R.J. Decker," is a classic example of the genre, with a Carl Hiaasen pedigree. The other, "Young Sherlock," from Arthur Conan Doyle via a series of young adult novels by Andrew Lane, imagines Holmes at 19 – and is therefore not strictly a private detective show, though the character he'll grow up to be will set the pattern for those to follow.

In "R.J. Decker," premiering Tuesday on ABC (and subsequently streaming on Hulu), Scott Speedman (who will always be the guy from "Felicity," though he is a nicely broken-in 50 now), plays the eponymous medium-boiled sleuth, a South Florida newspaper photographer turned PI, pulled from Hiaasen's 1987 novel "Double Whammy," which otherwise has nothing else to do with this show. (Hiaasen's "Bad Monkey" became an excellent series in 2024.)

The series opens with Decker outside a courthouse explaining to a strange woman – that is, a woman who's a stranger – that he's about to learn whether he'll be going to prison over a fight with a "kid" who

Daniel Smith / Amazon Prime / TNS

Dónal Finn, left, and Hero Fiennes Tiffin in Prime Video's "Young Sherlock."

was stealing his camera equipment, but who happens to be a state senator's son, and lied to police about the circumstances. Surprisingly, they have sex in his car, in a conveniently empty parking garage, before, almost as surprisingly, she turns out to be the final witness against him: She's Emi Ochoa (Jaina Lee Ortiz), the victim's brother, and her tearful, duplicitous testimony leads to a title card reading "Two Years Later." Decker spent 18 months of that time behind bars, and now he's living in a trailer (like Jim Rockford), an ex-con (like Jim Rockford) working as a private detective (like Jim Rockford) and dressing like Thomas Magnum. Decker will also find himself at the wrong end of a fist, also like Jim Rockford.

Surrounding Decker are his ex-wife, Catherine Delacroix (Adelaide Clemens), a journalist, with whom he's friendly; she's married to Det. Mel Abreau (Bevin Bru), with whom he's slightly less friendly. Wish Aiken (Kevin Rankin) is his old cellmate, whose innocence Decker managed to prove while they were both still incarcerated; freed from prison just one day before he would have been released anyway, Wish went out and bought a Scratcher, won a million dollars and bought a bar. You'll see a lot of this place.

Emi, whose family is "Fort Lauderdale's answer to the freaking Borgias" (says Decker), pops by the bar to apologize for helping send him up the river. (The sex was because she knew she would do it.) It puts her in his moral debt and will undoubtedly keep her around through the series. (Only two episodes were available for review, but her billing is high.) Though he takes a minute to upbraid her, they're obviously the show's binary system, and Decker is in any case a cheery sort who takes things in stride – even prison, seemingly. Which is not to say he doesn't want to see justice done. The show has a light, quirk-friendly tone it shares with its Tuesday night procedural partners "Will Trent" and "High Potential," also on ABC, and if you're the sort who likes to let a network play straight through prime time, this is a good place to park.

Coincidentally, the hero of "Young Sherlock" – beginning Wednesday on Prime Video and no relation to the 1985 film "Young Sherlock Holmes" – also starts his series with a prison sentence, having been nabbed while practicing pickpocketing. (It was just to develop the skill.) Respectable older brother Mycroft (Max Irons), who works for the foreign office, springs him from the pokey; he has got Sherlock (Hero Fiennes Tiffin), just 19, a place at Oxford, not as a student but a servant, a "scout" – a part he performs well – though this will change, of course, once the "game is afoot," as this Sherlock will declare.

> **'R.J. Decker'**
>
> **How to watch:** 10 p.m. ET Tuesdays on ABC (and streaming on Hulu)
>
> **'Young Sherlock'**
>
> **How to watch:** On Prime Video

This is something of an origin story, but the childhood trauma that haunts his dreams, and powers one of the series' main mysteries, has no evident influence on his waking personality; in fact, as Holmeses go, he's fairly normal – affectionate and puckish, if a little serious and proper. Though we're told he has no friends, it's mostly so the series can give him one. Surprisingly, that turns out to be James Moriarty (Dónal Finn), who will grow up, canonically, to become his archnemesis and evil double, "the Napoleon of crime." But for now he is a jovial Irish scamp, with the merest hint of a dark streak; where Sherlock comes from money, James, as he's called here, is at school on a scholarship. Indeed, the happiest invention of "Young Sherlock" is to make them friends and collaborators, if rivals when it comes to Princess Gulun Shou'an (Zine Tseng), a student newly arrived from China. Indeed, the show's greatest source of tension for me was worrying whether they'd get to remain pals. They make an adorable couple.

Because there's almost nothing in Doyle's stories about Holmes' early or private life, the pastiche-maker has a virtually blank canvas to work upon. "Young Sherlock" paints in a mother, Cordelia (Natascha McElhone) institutionalized, artistic; a father, Silas (Joseph Fiennes), absent, then present; and a sister, deceased, whose death is the source of Sherlock's self-accusal and nightmares. This is, however, only a starting point.

Written by Matthew Parkhill, with Guy Ritchie – who directed Robert Downey Jr. in two steroidal Holmes films – helming some episodes, it's pulpy and nutty and preposterous, mostly in a good way. There's fighting and running and shooting, with the Damned and Black Sabbath on the soundtrack and, of course, oodles of deduction, from Sherlock and James alike. There's so much going on, it's as if three or four films had been mashed into one. (It can be confusing.) There's the Mystery of the Missing Scroll, and the Case of the Dying Dons, with a kind of domestic drama in the middle, and an "Indiana Jones" finale, set in exotic locations, including a spin through the Paris Commune. Colin Firth plays Sir Bucephalus Hodge, a bigwig whose exact credentials escape me, but who's giving the university a new science building. Lestrade (Scott Reid), not yet a Scotland Yard inspector, appears as a blustery constable, and there's a Det. Fitget (Simon Delaney) who arrives in a deerstalker cap, smoking a pipe.

All eight episodes premiere at once, the better to binge them, and having stayed up until 2 a.m. doing just that, I can tell you it's not hard, and hard not to do.

Smells like grunge

How Nirvana and Pearl Jam upset the rock cart 35 years ago

By SCOTT MERVIS
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

PITTSBURGH — Through the '80s the rock underground stayed down in the trenches that its name suggested.

Sonic Youth, Pixies, Dinosaur Jr., Husker Du, Melvins and the like spent the decade wrestling rock back from Aqua Net and studio polish and redefining what heavy, noisy, and emotional rock could be. Nobody outside the college-radio ghetto cared, but their experiments were a blueprint for two "grunge" behemoths, Nirvana and Pearl Jam, to drag the underground into the light.

The tectonic shift began 35 years ago, in late 1991, when Pearl Jam and Nirvana emerged from the Pacific Northwest fog with "Ten" and "Nevermind," respectively, just a month apart.

It didn't happen overnight, but within a year, the underground found an exit sign, took a wrong turn and ended up on MTV, making the hair-metal bands of the day look more ridiculous than they already did.

While Nirvana has the claim to getting there first – its debut album, "Bleach," came out in June 1989 – Pearl Jam co-founders Stone Gossard and Jeff Ament had been kicking around since the mid-'80s in Green River and then Mother Love Bone.

Ament explained their evolution to Seattle music zine The Rocket in 1986, saying, "The hardcore scene pretty much died out about a year ago and everyone just went back to doing what they wanted to do."

For Green River, that meant injecting just enough hardcore urgency into the stomp of Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin. They rubbed elbows with Mudhoney, the gloriously sludgy Sub Pop act whose 1988 single "Touch Me I'm Sick" was a sneering, fuzz-soaked precursor to "Smells Like Teen Spirit."

The punk-metal amalgam wasn't limited to Seattle, as Jane's Addiction was taking a similar route in LA and Smashing Pumpkins in Chicago. Both bands would help make "grunge" a household word.

Sonic Temple

Pittsburgh got its first whiff of this on July 9, 1989 when Nirvana – still a baby band with baby problems, like remembering how to play the intro to "About a Girl" – rolled into Sonic Temple, a storefront venue on South Avenue in Wilkinsburg. It was about a month after "Bleach," which hinted at something volcanic to come between the heavy riffs and Kurt Cobain's raw-throated, angsty vulnerability.

The summer of '89 version of the band – Cobain, bassist Krist Novoselic, guitarist Jason Everman and drummer Chad Channing – played to about 20 people, a crowd that could have fit into the bathroom at a Poison concert.

Manny Theiner, always a little ahead of his time, booked them as he would any promising Sub Pop act at the time.

"Nirvana were not booked on the basis of 'Bleach' already being out," Theiner says. "They were booked on the basis of 1. being on Sub Pop. 2. having the 'Love Buzz' 7-inch – it was at WRCT and WPTS – and 3. the 'Bleach' promo cassette being in our hands well in advance of the release. They were a band like any other, on the road with a reputable label and releases out which sounded good. I guess we were right, because 'Bleach' already sold 40,000 copies before anyone had heard 'Nevermind.'"

The band's 12-song set, according to a review at LiveNirvana.com, included all but three of the 11 "Bleach" songs. "Krist kept messing up the intro to 'About a Girl,' so he stepped into the doorway of the band room, away from all the staring eyes and the pressure, so he could concentrate and play the intro right."

At the end of the show, it notes, "Cobain smashed his sunburst Fender Mustang beyond repair."

The poor couch

If punk in the '70s was the Molotov cocktail lobbed into the boardroom, the hardcore and noise-rock that followed in the '80s was the smoldering wreckage left behind.

The majors grabbed Husker Du and the Replacements in the mid-'80s and the Earth shook a little more when noise-rock kings Sonic Youth jumped to Geffen in 1990 for "Goo."

It cracked the door for Nirvana's move to DGC Records for "Nevermind," an album recorded partly at Sound City in L.A. with the souped-up production of Garbage drummer Butch Vig.

Aj Barratt / UPPA via ZUMA Press / TNS

From left, Dave Grohl, Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic of Nirvana in London, circa 1992.

"Smells Like Teen Spirit," the definitive grunge anthem, hit radio on Aug. 27, 1991, and the iconic video, shot at a high school gym, premiered on MTV's alt-rock show "120 Minutes" on Sept. 29.

"I think what happened is, everybody was ready for a change," says Pittsburgh musician Todd Kaczorowski, who formed The Ten Band in 2003. "As soon as 'Teen Spirit' hit on MTV, the world changed. The look, the flannel, the combat boots. That video came out and, overnight, everybody was like 'THAT's what I want to be, and that's what I want to do.'"

Although the band was happy with the end result, mixed by Andy Wallace (Slayer), Cobain would later say, "I'm embarrassed by it now. It's closer to a Mötley Crüe record than it is a punk rock record."

The initial shipment in the U.S. was just 46,000 copies and it debuted down at No. 144 on the Billboard 200, so there wasn't a massive buzz for Nirvana's second and, sadly, last Pittsburgh show on Sept. 30 at Graffiti, the 500-capacity showcase on the corner of Baum and Bigelow Boulevards in Oakland.

It was six days after "Nevermind" and one day after the "Teen Spirit" video. For this tour, Nirvana was a trio, with Cobain, Novoselic and drummer Dave Grohl, who had landed in Seattle after the breakup of his Washington, D.C., band Scream.

Pittsburgh promoter Mike Elko, who booked the Graffiti show, got a call from Nirvana's agent with a sweet offer.

"He says, 'Listen, you gotta pay them $1,000.' I'm like, 'Well, how do I know what they are?' He goes, 'Don't worry, the record label is going to make sure you have people come in.' Remember how the record labels used to buy like 100, 200 tickets for people to come see new artists? That's what happened.'"

The rest of the 300 or so tickets sold for $10 advance and $12 at the door. New York band Das Damen opened, and then Nirvana hit the stage with the Vaselines' song "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," soon to be one of the highlights of the 1994 "MTV Unplugged in New York" under the new moniker "Jesus Doesn't Want Me for a Sunbeam." Nirvana continued with an even mix of songs from "Bleach" and "Nevermind," a version of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" faithful to the record being the fourth.

Based on a bootleg, Cobain didn't say anything between songs. The show is just as memorable for what went down in the basement dressing room due to a discrepancy between the band and Graffiti owner Tony Policicchio over the merch sales.

"They didn't want to pay their percentage of merchandise and I couldn't pay the band until they paid that percentage of the merchandise," Elko says. "They got into a little bit. After a heated half-hour between Tony and the band, they finally settled it and I went down to pay the band and, in the meantime, after I walked out of the dressing room, they threw matches on a couch and caught the dressing room on fire."

The fire marshal came and boarded the tour bus to arrest the band for starting the fire. The venue chose not to press charges and they were on their way – to the top of the charts.

"Nevermind" went to No. 1 four months later in January 1992, establishing Cobain as the collective panic attack of Generation X – angry and frustrated with no clear articulation of why.

Record labels scrambled to react, ushering in a new era of modern rock with exciting new bands and ungodly retreads.

Cobain, wearing fame like a cardigan sweater, was never built for stadium heroism and struggled with the weight of Nirvana's fame, leading to the more abrasive followup, "In Utero," in late 1993. Had the logical profession played out, Nirvana would have made its third Pittsburgh appearance as the headliners of Lollapalooza in the summer of 1994.

Instead, Cobain, viewing the festival as too corporate, backed out, leaving the Pumpkins as a weak headliner on a sagging tour.

Lolla Nation wanted Nirvana. It got tragedy instead.

In a profound mental and physical decline, Cobain died of a gunshot wound on April 5, 1994, devastating a generation (and a young daughter), and spawning speculation to this day. Was that a suicide note or was it was murder?

PJ's ascendence

There was never a Sonic Temple moment here for Pearl Jam.

"Ten" came out in late August 1991 and barely anyone blinked, the album being sandwiched between the mega-hyped Metallica "The Black Album" and Guns N' Roses' double-barrelled "Use Your Illusion I" and "Use Your Illusion II."

The alternative universe was consumed with Perry Farrell's first Lollapalooza tour with Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Rollins Band, Fishbone and Living Colour.

Pearl Jam began a club tour which it aborted to join the tour of small arenas with Red Hot Chili Peppers and Smashing Pumpkins. The Pearl Jam connection was the Chili Peppers' original drummer, Jack Irons, who had turned San Diego singer Eddie Vedder onto the band by giving him their demos. He also got them on the Chili Peppers tour. Irons joined Pearl Jam from 1994 to 1998.

So this was one red-hot triple bill, right? Eh, not really.

Based on reviews, the late-arriving crowds were there to see the Chili Peppers, who were set to release "Blood Sugar Sex Magik" on the same day as "Nevermind."

The Pumpkins, which released debut "Gish" in May, were getting a dismal reaction, prompting Billy Corgan into conflicts with the crowds.

In Indiana, according to The Star Press, Corgan said from the stage, "This is great. We've never played a funeral before."

According to The St. Louis Dispatch, "The Smashing Pumpkins seemed way out of its league."

"Opening acts Pearl Jam and Smashing Pumpkins were yawns," according to The Indianapolis News.

Pearl Jam's Pittsburgh debut, at the AJ Palumbo Center on Oct. 25, drew a little over 3,000 people. The Pittsburgh Press said Pearl Jam "turned in an above-average mix of wah-wah guitar, feedback, deft touches of melody and hard rock" and declared the Pumpkins a "third-rate mix of Led Zeppelin and Sonic Youth."

Sonic Youth, incidentally, had gone from the Electric Banana (1986-87) and Graffiti (1990) to the Civic Arena stage that February to open for Neil Young and Crazy Horse with Social Distortion. It was a rough-go for the noise-rock titans who did not seem happy with the situation.

Where Pearl Jam stood out on that tour was in the death-defying antics of Vedder, who was stage-diving and scaling balconies and lighting rails. Grohl would tell Spin, "It was one of the scariest things I've ever seen live in my entire life."

The drummer got a firsthand look at Pearl Jam in December 1991. Nirvana was breaking big and the Chili Peppers wanted them on their California dates to help fill arenas. Pearl Jam was to be bumped, but Corgan pulled the Pumpkins instead to avoid an encounter with his ex and Cobain's current girlfriend, Courtney Love.

For four dates only, ever, Nirvana and Pearl Jam were on the same bill.

Vedder and company took off a few months later with its "Saturday Night Live" debut in April '92 and MTV Unplugged in May – sending the album into the Top 10. It stayed on the charts for 264 weeks, peaking at No. 2.

By the time Pearl Jam got back to Pittsburgh, on Aug. 16, 1992, the band was running hot enough to cause a small riot. Security found itself in a cage match with fans jumping the rails in one of the wildest half-hours in Star Lake history.

"I will never forget the throng of people that just went rushing up over that hill to get onto the lawn," Kaczorowski says. "When Pearl Jam came out, it was like a throng of people. It was like things that you saw in Woodstock that I was too young to experience. You knew without a doubt that something had changed, the world had changed substantially."

They may have lacked Nirvana's cool cred, but the band's heavy crunch and Vedder's earnest style – turning deeply personal stories like "Alive," "Black" and "Jeremy" into anthems – set it up for decades of arena-rock glory.

Grunge wave

That second Lollapalooza, the first to play Pittsburgh, was headlined by the Chili Peppers, but had a second grunge band on the main stage in Soundgarden.

Soundgarden's path through Pittsburgh had been a slow escalation: Upstage in '89, City Limits in '90 with Voivod, Metropol with Danzig the same year, and then finally the big festival stage in '92 with alt radio and MTV play for "Outshined" and "Rusty Cage."

Meanwhile, there was Alice in Chains, the sludge-metal prophets who played a "soporific" set, according to the PG, at Star Lake on the Clash of the Titans bill in June '91 with Slayer, Anthrax and Megadeth. The show drew a mere 4,700, but then "Dirt" happened a year later and Alice roared back to headline the fiery '93 Lollapalooza with Primus, Dino Jr., Tool and Rage Against the Machine also on that bill.

On the fringes of the grunge carnival were the second-tier prophets – Screaming Trees lumbering their way to Star Lake to open for the Spin Doctors (a matchup that still baffles), Stone Temple Pilots (debuting here at the Civic Arena in '93 and working its way up to Star Lake in 2000) and Hole (debuting here at Metropol playing Lolla, post-tragedy, at Star Lake in '95).

Despite the rock press declaring the death of grunge in '95, the top bands (Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, Alice in Chains, Soundgarden) didn't go away and the market was flooded with post-grunge bands like Bush, Candlebox, Live, Hootie & the Blowfish and, ultimately, Seven Mary Three, Creed and Nickelback.

Pittsburgh flannel

The Pittsburgh music scene watched the grunge invasion from 2,500 miles away and reacted, for the most part, by maybe rocking a little more flannel.

The marquee bands here were serving hippie jams (Rusted Root), heartland rock (the Clarks, the Gathering Field), synth-rock (the Affordable Floors) and retro-garage (the Cynics).

But there were a few bands picking up on that same vibe felt in Seattle. Kaczorowski spent the early '90s in the band Voodoo Wagon, a fusion of heavy things that weren't punk, new wave, hardcore or hair metal.

"Voodoo Wagon was into blues, Zeppelin, Southern rock, but also heavily influenced by the Chili Peppers, so we took all that sort of stuff, and turned it into a heavier rock thing," he says.

He would go on to do that in Rumblefish as well.

There was Kelly Affair, a heavy outfit featuring Mike Michalski (Heretics, Little Wretches) and Bob Petri, a Jim Morrison acolyte who died of alcohol poisoning on New Year's Day 1991. His replacement, John Bechtol, turned self-inflicted wax burns on his shaved head into performance art. The band imploded over creative differences in February '95.

One month later, D.O.S.E. emerged at the Graffiti Rock Challenge as Pittsburgh's most marketable answer to grunge.

Singer Jason Trunzo told the PG then "the whole 'alternative' thing has not been clearly defined here in Pittsburgh" and that the city "is in need of a band of our caliber." "Sex With Sara," its debut album and prize for winning that Challenge, was not the ticket out of the Pittsburgh clubs and by fall '96 D.O.S.E was gone.

That same year, though, Anti-Flag dropped "Die for the Government," joining the likes of Don Caballero and the Karl Hendricks Trio as the preferred Pittsburgh exports from the rock underground.

Thirty-five years later, we still have Pearl Jam trips to Pittsburgh, we get Jerry Cantrell of Alice in Chains, the Stone Temple Pilots without Scott Weiland and we have all the tribute bands like Ten.

Ten played its first gig at the South Side Street Spectacular in July 2003 just for fun.

"We had no idea if anybody was even going to be interested in this thing. And it went absolutely insane," Kaczorowski said. "There were people stage diving, there were girls, there were girls on stage taking their shirts off. It was mass hysteria."

Two decades later, Ten is still touring, playing big venues well beyond Pittsburgh

"We do a rehearsal, we hit the road, jump on stage and we're rock stars for the night. And it's insane. It blows my mind that people still come to see it and have some such passion for it. We nearly sold out the House of Blues in Cleveland last month just playing primarily the 'Ten' album, and people were just as passionate and jumping up and down and going crazy like it was 1992."

Just don't book them with a Nirvana tribute band. As he sees it, the Nirvana crowd leans more into punk, new wave and noise rock, while Pearl Jam is right in line with blues-rock, Zeppelin, Aerosmith.

"There's nothing super alternative about Pearl Jam. They were classified as alternative, but I don't even know if that is right. It's rock 'n' roll music.

"So, the two crowds will not mix. If you put Pearl Jam and Nirvana tribute bands on the same bill, you have an awful show, because you've got two different crews of people."

BOOKS

Lisa Maree Williams / Getty Images, TNS

Liza Minnelli attends a press conference ahead of her tour “Liza’s at the Palace” at the Sydney Opera House on Oct. 13, 2009, in Sydney.

LIZA MINNELLI reflects on whirlwind love affairs, from Desi Arnaz Jr. to Martin Scorsese

By VIVIAN KWARM
New York Daily News (TNS)

NEW YORK — Liza Minnelli takes an intimate, unfiltered look at her whirlwind love life in her upcoming memoir, “Kids, Wait Till You Hear This!”

The book chronicles her roller-coaster romances with men from Desi Arnaz Jr. to Martin Scorsese, in addition to her “traumatizing” marriage to David Gest.

In 1972, Minnelli got engaged to Desi Arnaz Jr., the son of comedy couple Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. At the time, she was still legally married to his first husband, Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen, though the two had agreed to a trial separation in 1970.

Minnelli writes in her memoir that she and Arnaz Jr. bonded over growing up in the public eye and having famous parents – her mother being Judy Garland and her father director Vincente Minnelli.

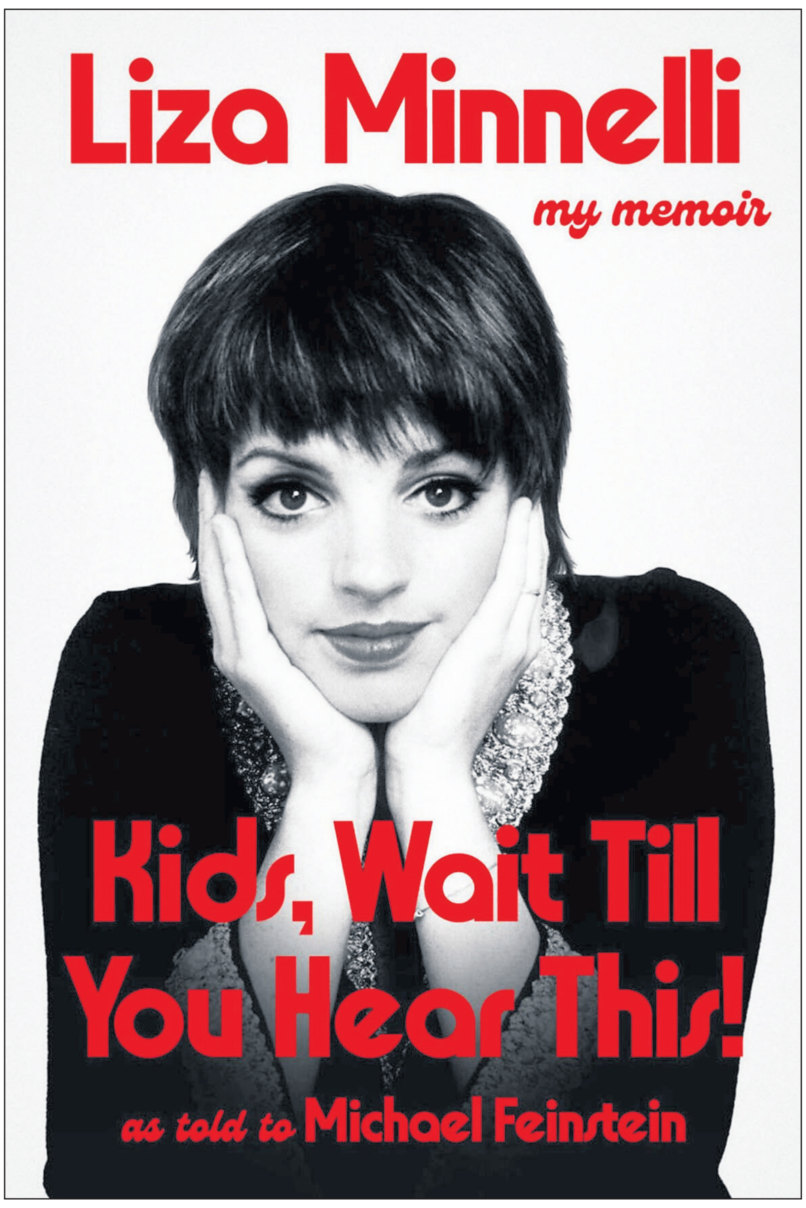
But by 1973, things got a bit chaotic. She fell for actor Peter Sellers and somehow ended up engaged to two men at the same time.

However, her romance with Sellers quickly fizzled, not long before Minnelli divorced Allen, who later told her he was gay.

In September 1974, just two months after the divorce was finalized, Minnelli married Jack Haley Jr., the son of actor Jack Haley, who played the Tin Man alongside her mother in “The Wizard Of Oz.”

But during their marriage, she had an affair with Scorsese, who directed Minnelli in the 1977 film “New York, New York.”

“Truth be told, our love affair had more layers than a lasagna. We were both Italian. Passionate. Intense. Committed to our craft. We both had volcanic tempers,” Minnelli writes of Scorsese, according to an excerpt of the memoir obtained by People. “He was a diabolically handsome man who shared my love for film. I was a director’s daughter.”



Grand Central Publishing / TNS

Ultimately, that romance was also short-lived. By the time “New York, New York” hit theaters, she and Scorsese had already gone their separate ways, and by April 1979, she was divorced from Haley Jr.

In December of ’79, Minnelli tied the knot with sculptor and stage manager Mark Gero, a marriage that would last until 1992.

Then in 2001, Minnelli met actor and producer David Gest at a CBS concert special for their mutual friend Michael Jackson. They ended up getting married in 2002, but the relationship soon took a troubling turn, making headlines and causing concern among her friends.

“I clearly wasn’t sober when I married this clown,” Minnelli writes of her marriage to Gest.

“He didn’t just control everything I ate, from morning to night. He controlled the people I saw and spoke to on the phone,” she describes. “He screened my calls. In truth, I was his prisoner.”

In a 2003 lawsuit, Gest alleged that Minnelli drunkenly beat him throughout their marriage – accusations Minnelli denied, claiming Gest was merely after her money. The suit was ultimately dismissed for lack of evidence, roughly seven months before they divorced in 2007.

Even after all the trials and tribulations, Minnelli, who’s about to turn 80, says she’s still open to love today.

“Ideally, I’d like to date an older elegant man who dresses beautifully and is filthy rich,” she playfully writes. “Then I’d like to date a 40-year-old guy who is passionate about something. I don’t care what. Then I’d like to date an 18-year-old, who I see twice a week and whose name I don’t know.”

“Kids, Wait Till You Hear This!” is set to be released on March 10 and is currently available for preorder.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Feb. 21, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
2. The Astral Library. Kate Quinn. Morrow
3. The Hard Line. Mark Greaney. Berkley
4. Crown of War and Shadow. J.R. Ward. Bramble
5. Cross and Sampson. Patterson/Sitts. Little, Brown
6. Operation Bounce House. Matt Dinniman. Ace
7. Agnes Aubert’s Mystical Cat Shelter. Heather Fawcett. Del Rey
8. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
9. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
10. The Devil’s Bible. Steve Berry. Grand Central

Hardcover nonfiction

1. Stripped Down. Bunnie Xo. Dey Street
2. Be Your Own Bestie. Misha Brown. Hay House
3. Nobody’s Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
4. Manufacturing Delusion. Buck Sexton. Sentinel
5. The Look. Michelle Obama. Crown
6. Stop, in the Name of God. Charlie Kirk. Winning Team
7. American Struggle. Jon Meacham. Random House
8. The Joy Exchange. Laura Hope Whitaker. Wiley
9. Heal Your Hurting Mind. Craig Groeschel. Zondervan
10. The Greatest Sentence Ever Written. Walter Isaacson. Simon & Schuster

Trade paperback

1. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
2. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
3. Jujutsu Kaisen, Vol. 29. Gege Akutami. Viz
4. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
5. Woman Down. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
6. The Lion Beneath the Fade. Sebastian Bastian. Advantage
7. Two Can Play. Ali Hazelwood. Berkley
8. A Killing Cold. Kate Alice Marshall. Pine & Cedar
9. Picking Daisies on Sundays. Liana Cincotti. Forever
10. Reminders of Him. Colleen Hoover. Montlake

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

‘The Method’ is the latest from ‘The Night Agent’ author

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

The first time Anna Vaughn almost gets killed is on the third page of “The Method.” There will be literally dozens more “almosts” in the next 400 pages.

“The Method” is the danger-packed new thriller from Matthew Quirk, whose “The Night Agent” is the basis of the Netflix spy series. “Method” introduces a new character, Vaughn, an actor who joins forces with an FBI representative when her best friend Natalie disappears. She ends up getting drawn into a vast conspiracy that involves a wealthy industrialist, secret codes and a handsome karaoke pianist who knows more than he reveals.

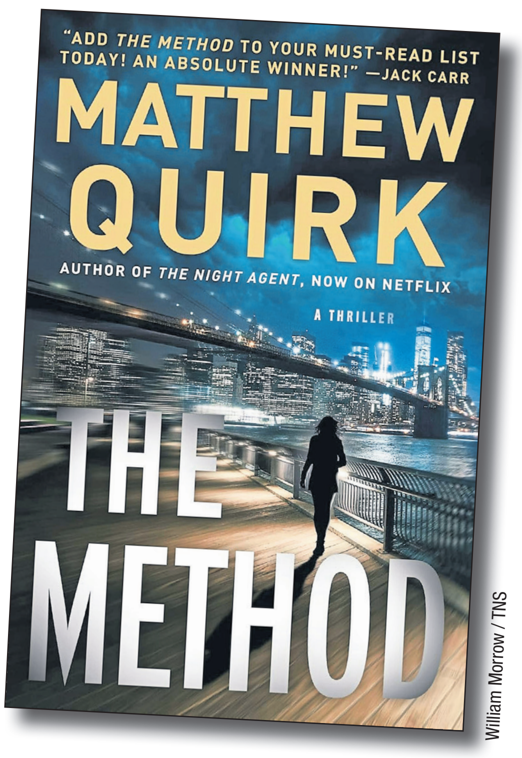
The fun-but-barely-credible idea in “The Method” is that, as an undercover agent, Vaughn is able to draw on skills she learned as an actor (John LeCarré did something similar with “The Little Drummer Girl”). So, she’s good at faking accents, she has had training in combat and firearms, she’s quick to improvise when things get dicey – and, apparently, she’s not getting many roles because she has scads of downtime to devote to making like Nancy Drew. When she goes on treacherous missions, with an FBI agent directing her through an earpiece, she’s an instant success.

Actual federal and law enforcement officers would probably laugh most of that off the page, since fake-it-until-you-make-it does not seem like a sound strategy for training spies. If Tom Cruise were to attempt to use his experience in umpteen “Mission: Impossible” movies to try to save the world IRL, I’d be more than a little nervous. But it works in “The Method,” which is light on character development but heavy enough on plot to power at least four episodes of the inevitable miniseries.

It’s twisty and involving as Vaughn delves deeper into a shadowy world of double-crossers and liars (not even counting Vaughn who, as some actors say, lies for a living). The plot of “The Method” forces Vaughn to keep questioning her allegiances. Is Sebastian, the too-hot-to-be-true pianist, really on her side or is he involved in Natalie’s disappearance? Is Vaughn’s FBI contact really interested in helping her find Natalie or is he just using her? As readers, we’re pretty sure we can trust Vaughn, whose head we’re in for most of the briskly written book, but all signs point to everyone else – possibly including Natalie – being questionable.

The writing can be ungainly on occasion, as when the FBI guy stops for some street food and we’re invited into way more of his thought process than the book needs or we want: “He tried it – stuffed with shredded beef and plantains – and gave an approving frown. He’d never had that one before. An arepa they called it. Venezuelan.”

But the good news is that “The Method” moves like crazy – stuffed with shredded alliances and huge twists – so I give it an approving grin. A page-turner they call it. Gets the job done.



William Morrow / TNS

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEW

2026 Nissan goes all out with Armada Platinum Reserve

By MARC D. GRASSO
Boston Herald (TNS)

When it comes to big SUVs, the market is flooded with options, from the Chevrolet Tahoe to Ford Expedition and even the Toyota Sequoia.

Plus, who could forget the Lexus LX, GMC Yukon, Cadillac Escalade and Jeep Wagoneer?

Within this flooded category, manufacturers offer a lot, including size, space, storage and comfort.

In Grasso's Garage this week, we have the super-sized 2026 Nissan Armada Platinum Reserve 4WD. This seven-seater, three-row SUV is big, bold and boxy.

While Nissan Motor Co. has done a good job in the past of delivering exceptional comfort, the Armada is no different. Boasting very cushy captain's seats in the first two rows, Nissan stands out from other non-luxury brands that struggle with comfort.

Riding on 22-inch machined and painted wheels, the 3.5-liter twin-turbo V-6 engine produced 425 horsepower and 516 pound-feet of torque. Paired with the familiar Nissan nine-speed automatic transmission, the Armada Reserve was very smooth.

With a $80K base price – the new normal in this SUV category – the 2026 Nissan Armada is ready to ride.

Marc Grasso / Boston Herald / TNS

On the interior, we noticed a panoramic moonroof with headliner illumination, plus 12-way power seats that are heated and ventilated. Additionally, the 14.3-inch color infotainment system includes SiriusXM, Google Assistant and a Klipsch Premium Audio system paired with 12 speakers.

2026 Nissan Armada Platinum Reserve 4WD

MSRP: $80,550

MPG: 16 city / 19 highway / 18.2 as tested

As Tested: $89,045

As an off-road-designed SUV, the Armada offers its first ever PRO-4X grade, which features all-terrain tires, off-road specific front bumper with skid plates, electronic locking differential and adaptive electronic air suspension. The Armada stands out from other SUVs significantly, as its fenders are flared and boasts Lava Red accents.

Our Platinum Reserve 4WD tester model was all about comfort and looks while still having typical Armada off-road capabilities.

In the overpopulated SUV category, the Armada tends to get lost amid the American-made options that lead in sales. Yet reliability is truly what sets Nissan apart, in addition to the exterior aesthetics that have always been the Armada's strong suit.

Turbo Alfa Tonale proves less is more with Italian flair

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Unburdened of its mission as the standard-bearer of an electric Alfa Romeo brand, the subcompact Tonale SUV can finally live la dolce vita.

For 2026, Alfa's tasty, turbocharged, gas-fired appetizer is lighter, cheaper, more fun. Less is more.

Gone is Alfa's dream to be an Italian Tesla. Gone, too, is Tonale's plug-in hybrid drivetrain with 30 miles of battery-only range that I flogged across Italy at the SUV's introduction in 2023. I thought I might miss the hybrid's electric motor and instant, 347 pound-feet of torque to complement a healthy 285 hp.

I was wrong.

Shedding 450 pounds without the 15.5 kWh electric battery/e-motor, my Tonale tester was powered by a simpler, 268-horse, turbocharged four-cylinder – meaning a healthy 12 percent weight loss (sounds like my New Year's Resolution). The fitter physique translates to quicker lateral movements – crucial in any vehicle, but especially beneficial in a high-riding SUV. With just 17 fewer ponies, turbo-Tonale is as quick to 60 mph as the ol' electrified model.

Less electrification also means less to pay, a rare discount in this age of high sticker prices driven by electrification and regulation.

The punchy turbo-4 entered Tonale's lineup in 2025 as a cheaper option to the $48K plug-in, and for 2026 it's the only choice. That means the Italy-assembled Tonale starts at $40,745 for the Sprint model and $46,495 for my terrific Sport Speciale model. That price would likely be cheaper were it not for the hefty (surely tariff-related) $3,250 destination fee.

That puts Tonale a healthy $5K under a comparable BMW X1/X2. For those who crave a sexy Italian in their driveway in a cul-de-sac full or German Audis, Bimmers and Mercs, the price provides even more temptation.

The ute gets its name from the Tonale Pass (Passo del Tonale) in north Italy's Alps, which features writhing roads with switchbacks made for sporty fun. The mountains also mean slick roads come wintertime, and the all-wheel-drive Tonale was bred to meet those challenging conditions, too.

From Montreal to Michigan this winter, the AWD Alfa carried me through diabolical conditions: sub-5 degree temps, driving snow, pouring rain. It's a reminder that, no matter how much sex appeal an SUV has, its first job is utility.

And this is one sexy SUV.

In a sea of sheet metal at January's Detroit Auto Show, a blood red Tonale caught my eye. Diamond cut wheels, tri-lobo grille, heartbeat taillights. Bene!

You had me at Diamond Cut wheels. Alfa's signature, phone-dial wheels on its recent-generation vehicles – from the 4C sports car to the Stelvio SUV – are a 10. The new-gen design takes it to 11. They are standard on my Sport Speciale model and an option on all trims, including the base $40K Sprint.

But you'll be kicking those wheels if Tonale can't perform in snow. AWD married to a beastly 268 horsepower/295-pound-feet of torque are made for churning white flakes.

Throw Bridgestone Blizzaks on the balanced Tonale as I did at Montreal's Circuit ICAR winter test track, and the Tonale dances like Alysa Liu on ice thanks to AWD torque-vectoring and the winter rubber's soft, grippy compound. Turning traction control off, I managed controlled slides around a snowy autocross course coupled with surprising braking ability.

Photos by Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

Consider Blizzaks if you live in snowy north Michigan. But with just 6.5 inches of ground clearance, Tonale isn't meant for off-road adventures like Winterfest at Holly Oaks ORV Park. Look to Stellantis's Jeep brand for an off-road tool.

On Michigan public roads, however, Tonale's innate balance and light weight (3,715 pounds) inspired confidence. In torrential February rains, the Alfa sliced through water on Michelin Pilot Sport all-seasons. When the rain inevitably turned to snow, Tonale did its job.

When the pavement dried out? Tonale is a hot hatch in SUV clothing.

Slip into the Tonale's interior and its tools are at hand. Starter button on the steering wheel. Motorcycle-like gauge cluster. Drive mode selector on the dash. Ready to rock.

On a playful stretch of Oakland County two-lane, I matted the gas and Tonale took off like a nervous cat. The nine-speed transmission isn't as smooth as, say, the Mazda CX30's superb six-speed. At throttle tip-in, it seems momentarily startled, as if unsure which of its nine gears to select. Once hooked up, the Tonale accelerated smoothly in upper gears.

The heavy steering counters the driveline's initial nerves. Dress Tonale in Rosso Brera Red, Monza Green, or my tester's Milan White and you'll turn heads.

Because no one will hear it coming. Curiously for a car that comes from a country that produced opera legends like Pavarotti and Caruso, the Tonale's pipes are muted. Even in DYNAMIC mode, turbo-Tonale's music at 5,000 RPM redline disappointed.

Drivers will have to satisfy themselves with the cabin performance toys: paddle shifters (in upper Speciale and Veloce trims), drive modes, plenty of ponies.

The base Sprint comes well equipped with standard features like adaptive cruise control, blind-spot assist, rear cross-traffic alert, wireless charger and wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto. Graduate to upper trims and more goodies come online, like those shifter paddles, panoramic roof, leather seats, and (ooooh) red leather thrones.

Load up the Tonale and it will push $50K. But in keeping with its value proposition, a base Sprint model with those irresistible Diamond Cut wheels is plenty satisfying at $42K.

Unlike its discontinued Hornet sibling (Dodge's entry for the mainstream compact SUV market) made on the same platform, Tonale is a subcompact aimed at smaller, whip-quick luxe utes like the BMW X1/X2 and Audi Q3. That means a competitive 38 inches of rear legroom.

2026 Alfa Romeo Tonale

★★★★

Vehicle type: All-wheel drive, five-passenger subcompact SUV

Price: Base: $40,745, including $3,250 destination charge ($46,495 Sport Speciale as tested)

Powerplant: 2.0-liter, turbocharged inline-4 cylinder

Power: 268 horsepower, 295 pound-feet torque

Transmission: Nine-speed automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 6.5 seconds (mfr.); top speed, 140 mph; towing, 3,307 pounds

Weight: 3,715 pounds (as tested)

Range: EPA est. mpg 21 city/29 highway/24 combined; 391-mile gas range

Report card

Highs: Signature Alfa style inside and out; playful dynamics

Lows: Nervous throttle tip in; muted exhaust note

Want a bigger rear seat like a BMW X3? Alfa has a compact Stelvio SUV it would like to show you. (Speaking of Stelvio, Tonale's lower rear corners have cutouts for bazooka exhaust pipes like Stelvio's Quadrifoglio high-performance model. Could there be an even hotter Tonale hatch in the future?)

Cargo space under the hot hatch is healthy. My Tonale Speciale tester came only with a tire repair kit, an oversight should you get a flat in, say, the Alps' Tonale Pass. The good news is the space is big enough for a spare skinny wheel 'n' tire.

Like driver brands BMW and Mazda, Alfa is eager to translate its performance DNA to SUVs. The heavy, expensive plug-in drivetrain worked against that goal. No longer tethered to an uncertain EV future, the '26 Tonale is focused on what Alfa does best: performance. Magnifico.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

A truly wireless charger

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

There's a funny thing about most wireless smartphone chargers: They need a wire. Often a cable connects the charging pad to its power source. **Twelve South's PowerBug 35-watt magnetic wireless charger** is the first I've seen that is truly wireless.

Setup is simple: Plug it into any standard household AC outlet to turn it into a MagSafe charger. Connect your Qi2- or MagSafe-compatible smartphone to the puck-shaped (2.3 inches by 1.14 inches deep/3.35 ounces) wireless charger. On the backside are fold-out AC prongs. Twelve South lists the compatibility with all Qi2 and MagSafe-enabled smartphones.

Depending on your AC outlet's location, the PowerBug can power your smartphone while keeping it ready for streaming, video conferencing, or just in standby mode. Whatever you choose, it will be in true 100 percent wireless charging.

If you add your own USB-C cable, you can use the side port to power a second device simultaneously. You can charge another smartphone, earbuds or any device needing up to 35 watts of fast charging. If you connect two devices, the USB-C port supplies 20 watts, and the wireless connection provides 15 watts.

The PowerBug was so popular upon its debut last year that it was almost instantly out of stock. Now it's back and ready to transform any AC outlet into a dual charging station.

https://www.twelvesouth.com/products/powerbug, $49.99, available in white/dune or slate/black color combinations

Depending on your AC outlet's location, the PowerBug can power your smartphone while keeping it ready for streaming, video conferencing, or just in standby mode. Whatever you choose, it will be in true 100 percent wireless charging.

Twelve South / TNS

Scosche's Magstack USB-C to USB-C charging cables feature magnets, making it easy to keep the cables clutter-free.

The high-quality braided cables have an outside tangle-free braided nylon jacket and an aluminum housing. The construction includes a Statik MagStack magnetic sleeve, which makes it even easier to coil the cable for a clean, clutter-free desk or storage.

The cable is available in 3- or 6-foot lengths and is USB-certified for rapid data transfer and fast, safe charging. It will also attach itself to a metal or steel surface to keep things neat and orderly.

Magstack is a USB-C 3.2 cable certified for 60 watts. They are rated for up to 480 mbs transfer speeds.

https://www.scosche.com/cabm-tangle-free-usbc-to-usba-magnetic-charging-cable, $29.99

When it comes to travel gadgets, smaller is better, and that's exactly where the **Tessan PD 20W universal travel adapter** shines.

The pocket-sized, ultra-thin 4-in-1 global travel adapter (3.33 by 2.01 by 1.24 inches, 3.65 ounces) can power multiple devices simultaneously via its standard AC outlet, one USB-A port and two USB-C ports. With power from a single wall outlet, the USB-A port delivers up to 18 watts, and each USB-C port delivers up to 20 watts.

According to the specifications supplied, the travel adapter supports major plug types, including C, G, A, and I, covering most countries. They also highlight that it is not a voltage converter; instead, it is an adapter that can supply power to charge or power most any smartphone, tablet, computer, digital camera, hair dryer and other accessories needed on the go away from home.

Devices to be powered need to support 100V-250V dual voltage before use. And it is said to be cruise ship compliant.

https://tessan.com/products/ultra-thin-universal-travel-adapter-pd-20w, $19.99 on Amazon

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

When it comes to travel gadgets, smaller is better, and that's exactly where the Tessan PD 20W ultra-thin universal travel adapter shines.

Tessan / TNS

Scosche / TNS

Scosche's Magstack tangle-free USB-C to USB-C charging cables feature magnets, making it easy to keep the cables clutter-free.

AirDrop is coming to Android phones

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service

The cell phone world is divided into two camps – iPhone users and Android users.

Apple curates new features for iOS and Google develops for Android, and they likely don't spend a ton of time worrying about how their phones interact with phones from the other company.

There are features that are exclusive to iOS or Android that work because of some magic behind the scenes.

One of the most visible features that didn't play nice between iOS and Android has to do with text messages.

Apple's iMessage was introduced back in 2011, and it brought features like easier sharing of photos and videos, read receipts and some group chat features like being able to leave a chat or mute notifications.

iMessage also introduced the concept of blue messages (iMessages) and green messages (SMS messages).

If a group chat included just one Android user, those cool iMessage group chat features would not work. Apple is working on making Android more interoperable with iMessage.

Another Apple feature called AirDrop makes it super simple for Apple phone, tablet and computer users to magically transfer files to other Apple devices.

Every time our family gathers for holidays, I'm usually the one who takes the group photos with my iPhone, and these days everyone else in my family has iPhones so before we leave, I AirDrop the photos to everyone else.

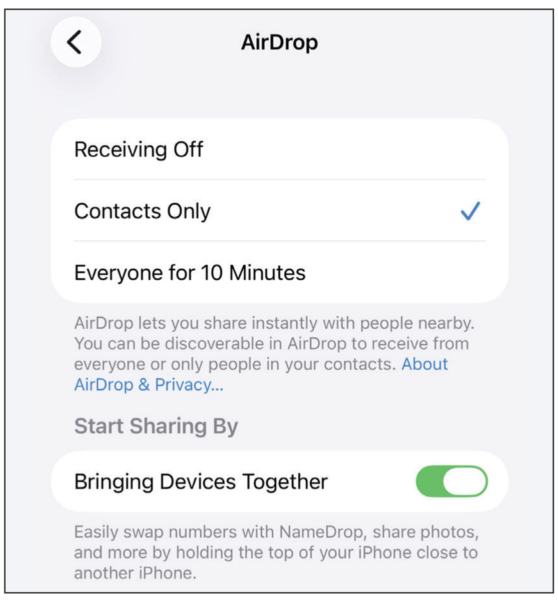
Apple makes it very simple to select and wirelessly transfer dozens of photos almost instantly. iPhones in the vicinity of each other just show up and are able to accept transfers.

Google introduced some AirDrop-compatible features on the Pixel 10 phone, and they call the feature QuickShare and announced that upcoming Android releases would bring AirDrop compatibility to more phones.

Apple is also working on making it easier to move files to Android users with a new feature called Transfer to Android that showed up in the latest iOS 26.3 beta.

This means both companies are working to make moving files easier, which is great for all of us.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.



Jim Rossman / TNS

An Apple feature called AirDrop makes it super simple for Apple phone, tablet and computer users to magically transfer files to other Apple devices.

TECH REVIEW

Two dash cam systems keep an eye on your trips

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I love watching the evolution of gadgets.

I've been around long enough to remember a time before we had a lot of the gadgets we take for granted today, like smartphones or laptops and today's topic, dash cams.

Today we are looking at two dash cams, the 4K A810S from 70mai and A329S from VIOFO.

Both offer 4K recording and tons of other features.

The 70mai would make a great first dash cam if you are a first-time buyer, while the VIOFO is aimed at the power user who needs to customize their system.

This isn't a comprehensive review, but these are two dash cams I really like, and hopefully you'll read enough about them to want to dive into the research for yourself.

70mai Dash Cam 4K A810S

$199.99, 70mai.com

This model is an updated version of the A810 – the A810S includes front and rear cameras. The front records in 4K while the rear is 1080p.

You can choose from two types of rear camera – interior, mounted in the back window, or exterior, mounted outside near your back license plate.

The main Dash Cam has a 4K sensor that's designed to adapt to changing lighting conditions. It uses an advanced license plate algorithm to prioritize recording the image of license plates in your videos. It uses a very good Sony Starvis 2 sensor.

It also has Night Owl Vision for great image capture at night and Lumi Vision for better image capture in near-total darkness for parking surveillance.

The A810S also has AI motion detection that can detect and notify you of suspicious activity around your parked vehicle. Once activity is noticed, the cameras will begin recording for 30 seconds.

The system records to an included 128-gigabyte microSD card and is constantly recording when you drive. It has the ability to detect collisions, and it will automatically buffer and save the video three minutes before and 30 seconds after impact.

You can also set the sensitivity of the parking sensor that notifies you and records your car's surroundings when it's jostled while parked. Instead of a traditional battery, the A810S uses a supercapacitor that can better handle the hot conditions inside your parked car all summer.

The kit comes with a 12v plug adapter and cables for connecting the cameras. There is also an optional hard-wire kit to tap directly into your car's fuse box for power. The hard-wire kit is necessary for the parking surveillance features.

There is also a 4G modem kit that requires a SIM card if you'd like to enable features like live remote monitoring from the app or real-time battery voltage information, live route tracking and Find My Car. With the 4G option, you can turn on your car's cameras for a peek, even if you're across the country.

The unit has GPS and Wi-Fi to directly connect to your smartphone to offload videos. You can also pop out the SD card and access the video through your computer.

VIOFO A329S 3-channel 4K Dash Cam

starting at $329.99, VIOFO.com

I've never seen a dash cam as configurable as the VIOFO A329S.

You can buy the A329S by itself as a front-facing dash cam for $329.99 (VIOFO.com).

You can buy the A329S along with a rear-facing camera, which is called a 2-channel system

For $359 and you can buy a 3-channel system with a front, rear and interior camera for $469.

You can also get a configuration with a waterproof rear camera (or two) designed to be mounted outside.

You can also configure how long you'd like the cable that runs to those rear cameras. The cable lengths vary from 6 meters to 20 meters, so this is a great dash cam for your car or for even the longest motorhomes.

The main dash cam has a 4K Sony Starvis 2 sensor and the other cameras have 2K Starvis 2 sensors. They all have HDR (high dynamic range) exposure control for capturing clear images of license plates.

There's also an optional 4x optical zoom telephoto camera.

The A329S has everything you'd want from a top-of-the-line dash cam, including Wi-Fi 6, GPS, voice control, multiplex video (combining the images of all three cameras into one video), low power impact detection and hybrid parking recording.

It also has a USB-C port for connecting an up to 4 terabyte SSD for large amounts of recording storage. The main camera storage is via microSD. The camera can use that USB-C port to connect a phone or computer to easily offload your videos.

The SSD option requires the optional hardwire adapter, which also is needed to monitor your vehicle when it's parked and turned off. You'll also get low battery protection, which can turn things off if your battery reaches a low power state or after a certain amount of time.

You can set up hybrid parking recording that shoots a 1 frame-per-second timelapse and then records a video clip in the event of an impact while you're parked.

The camera system ships with a 45-watt car charger that can power the A329S and has power left over to power up your phone. The interior and rear cameras connect via ultra-slim coax cable to the main camera. Data and power are handled through the same cable.

There's also a battery-powered Bluetooth remote you can place on your dashboard to turn the microphone on or off, turn Wi-Fi on or off and even a big button to press to mark and lock a video clip if you see something you want to tag and save.

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The VIOFO A329S 3-channel 4K Dash Cam.

VIOFO / TNS

70mai / TNS

The 70mai Dash Cam 4K A810S.

Colors of the year

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

When it comes to color, there is often an unspoken rule as it relates to color balance, pairings and creating a striking sense of contrast.

Enter the three 2026 Colors of The Year. They range from neutral to bold and all have myriads of possibilities to both sprinkle and spread to enhance areas of the home.

The 3 colors of the year

The three colors of the year are Pantone's Cloud Dancer, Sherwin-Williams Universal Khaki and BEHR's Hidden Gem. These colors are light neutral, warm neutral and deep, rich hue, respectively.

Where and how to use

While these colors may seem distinctively different, there is a commonality to them. In design there is a popular color term referred to as "foundation" colors. All in their own way can be used as a foundation or springboard to a color story or palette.

Cloud Dancer

This light, airy shade of white can easily be used as a primary foundation color, from an overall wall color to upholstery. These days, darker tones such as brown, gray and black are out and light colors are in. While some may see the trend as overly stark, these light colors allow for the opportunity for you to create any color combination you desire, beginning with a neutral blank slate. This color is ideal for walls, trim and ceilings where brightness is needed without the starkness of pure white.

Universal Khaki

This color is warm and cozy and can really add a sense of richness to a space. Think shades such as an elegant taupe or rich camel. These colors allow for an alternative to colors that are closer to white but still provide a grounded, earthy shade. Consider using this color for elements such as coffee and side tables, area rugs, throws and accent pillows as well as bedding. Universal Khaki can also be used in areas where the desire is to select a timeless color palette such as in the kitchen where this color can be used for cabinetry and counter surfaces. As a wall color, Universal Khaki can help to anchor a space and can work in spaces such as living rooms, dining rooms and bedrooms.

Hidden Gem

A smoky shade of green, this color won't disappoint when used as an accent or as a bold statement in a space in which you want color to dominate. Consider using this color perhaps as an overall color in a library or den or as a pop of color in a piece of artwork or an accent wall in a bedroom.

Can't decide? Mix Hidden Gem with Cloud Dancer and Universal Khaki for a balanced but expressive color palette.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

ABOVE: A Sherwin Williams Universal Khaki inspired space feels warm and inviting.
Scott Gabriel Morris / Handout / TNS
LEFT: Neutral on neutral colors similar to Pantone Cloud Dancer and Sherwin Williams, Universal Khaki create a warm, fresh living environment.
Handout / TNS

Scott Gabriel Morris / Handout / TNS

LEFT: Use of the color BEHR Hidden Gem, helps to create a surprise "pop of color." **RIGHT:** A Pantone Cloud Dancer inspired living space, feels elegant and luxurious.

What home projects should I focus on in 2026?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Every year homeowners ask me the same thing: Should I renovate, repair or just leave things alone for now?

Angi's 2025 State of Home Spending Report shows homeowners are still investing in their homes, but being more intentional about where their money goes. Households spent an average of $12,472 on home projects in 2025, with many prioritizing projects that improve daily life and prevent bigger expenses later.

Start with convenience. Smaller upgrades can have the biggest impact. Smart thermostats, lighting automation, and leak detectors help manage energy use and avoid costly damage. Kitchen storage improvements – like hidden pantries – are becoming popular because they solve everyday frustrations without requiring a full remodel. This feature, along with continuous countertops, are among the top planned kitchen trends that homeowners are considering for 2026.

Bathrooms are following a similar pattern. According to Angi's 2025 State of Home Spending Report, walk-in showers and rainfall showerheads are gaining attention not just for style, but for accessibility and ease of cleaning. Homeowners increasingly want upgrades that improve comfort and usability, not just appearance. Many people are adapting their current homes to fit their needs instead of moving.

Dreamstime / TNS

Routine maintenance, such as replacing HVAC filters and checking home systems, can help homeowners prevent costly repairs later.

Before focusing on finishes, look at how your home performs. Energy-efficient appliances, sealing drafts, and better insulation can lower monthly costs and improve comfort year-round. Durable materials are also growing in popularity because they require less maintenance. In fact, maintenance spending rose to $2,041 per household in 2025, as homeowners focus more on prevention.

Younger homeowners are helping shape many of these choices. Millennials now lead all generations in total home project spending per household, and 77 percent say they plan to take on a major home project within the next five years – far above the 49 percent average across homeowners. Their interest in technology upgrades and eco-friendly materials is influencing broader design trends, but it's important to not to overlook the basics while planning bigger upgrades.

Before starting a renovation, make sure your home's structure and core systems are in good shape and plan for any upgrades. Next, focus on maintenance. Maintenance remains the most common type of work, with 44 percent of homeowners completing at least one maintenance project in 2025. Schedule routine servicing for HVAC systems, check drainage around your foundation, and keep up with exterior upkeep like gutter cleaning and sealing. These preventive steps protect your home and help you avoid costly repairs that might delay the projects you're excited about.

If you're unsure where to begin, walk through your home without thinking about budget for now and ask three questions: What frustrates me every week? What costs me money each month? And what keeps me from enjoying my space?

Trends can offer inspiration, but the best home projects are the ones that support how you actually live. When you prioritize structure, maintenance, comfort and efficiency first, any design update you choose afterward will feel like a real improvement – not just a cosmetic one.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

TRAVEL

Jon Robyns and Lily Kerhoas of The Phantom of the Opera perform on stage during The National Lottery's Big Night of Musicals at the AO Arena in 2024.
Jeff Spicer / Getty Images for The National Lottery / TNS

Following 'Phantom'

How one musical became a reason to travel

By SHARYN JACKSON
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

The tour guide at the Palais Garnier in Paris spoke dramatically of the opera house's marvels: Marc Chagall's painted ceilings, the hidden signatures left by architect Charles Garnier, a stage so high it could hold the Arc de Triomphe.

But all I wanted to know was where the Opera Ghost kept his boat.

In the auditorium, she pointed to Box No. 5, which, according to the story, must always be kept empty because it belongs to the Phantom of the Opera. Our guide mentioned that "something" had happened there once. "A myth," she said, quickly moving on.

When I asked whether anyone could see the underground lake upon which the famed opera house was built, and where the ghost was rumored to reside, the answer was stern: "Oh no. No, no, no."

That visit to the opera house – the real one that inspired the story – was the middle stop on my whirlwind month of Phantom sightings. I had just seen "Masquerade," a new immersive reimagining of "The Phantom of the Opera," in New York City. Weeks later, the newly launched national tour of "Phantom" brought the tale closer to home, to the Orpheum Theatre in Minneapolis.

I first came to "Phantom" as a teenager when I saw the show on a class trip to New York and became obsessed with the cast recording. It was operatic and thrilling, and its earworm of a score burrowed deep in my brain.

But after one too many replays on my Discman, I couldn't listen to it at all. The melodrama started to feel frozen in the 1980s – cringey, a little too much synthesizer.

Last fall, I found my way back to it.

Immersive experiences

On a trip to New York to catch some new theater, I let my curiosity justify a $200 ticket to "Masquerade." The Andrew Lloyd Webber-approved production, directed by Diane Paulus, is staged inside a former art supply store in Midtown Manhattan. Audience members are handed masks at the door and a glass of sparkling wine at the start, then guided through a precise sequence of rooms.

It feels as if you're walking in on something that's already underway, but it isn't a free-for-all; cast members tell you where to stand, where to walk, when to sit and where to look. The experience is tightly orchestrated, even as it gives the illusion that the story is unfolding around you.

At one point, the Phantom and Christine, the ingenue and the object of his obsession, glide toward you in a gondola, crossing an underground lake. When the boat appeared, I giggled – an uncomfortable little laugh at how absurdly iconic the moment is, how close to parody it's become after all these years. And then, I felt myself choke up. I was choosing to believe.

After "Masquerade," my visit to the Palais Garnier gave real-life context to the fantasy of the musical. The tour of this 150-year-old Paris landmark begins on the ground floor, in dim corridors that once served as VIP entrances. It feels claustrophobic and almost subterranean, easy to imagine the low arches once lit only by lanterns.

Joel Saget / AFP/Getty Images / TNS

The dressing room of the "phantom of the Paris opera" at the Palais Garnier in Paris on Dec. 9, 2024. Inaugurated on Jan. 5, 1875, and classified as a historic monument, the Palais Garnier will celebrate its 150th anniversary, it houses part of the Paris Opera which presents ballets and lyrical works on stage

As you ascend the grand staircase, the opera house reveals itself in full. There is marble and gold everywhere, balconies jutting out so patrons could see and be seen, neat rows of doors to exclusive box seats. The plush red velvet auditorium feels impossibly ornate, crowned by the glittering chandelier. Grand doesn't begin to cover it.

The tour guide may have deflected my Phantom questions, but the opera house plays up just enough of the mystery. A brass plaque on the door to Box 5 reads "Loge du Fantôme de l'Opéra." And a room in the gift shop is devoted to the legend. There are white masks, eerie dolls and blue-bound editions of Gaston Leroux's stories, first published in 1909, about a disfigured musical genius, the seed that grew into the blockbuster musical.

Embracing reinvention

"The Phantom of the Opera," which turns 40 in 2026, has had extraordinary reach. More than 160 million people have seen it in over 200 cities worldwide, making it one of the most widely experienced live performances in history. It's the kind of show people return to again and again, often at very different moments in their lives.

"Phantom" continues to endure as Lloyd Webber has seemingly embraced reinvention. In recent years, the composer's works have been produced in striking new forms, with a stripped-down, Tony-winning revival of "Sunset Boulevard," a ballroom-infused "Cats" heading to Broadway in March, and "Masquerade," which pulls "Phantom" apart and rebuilds it as a walkthrough world.

The "Phantom" national tour offers another new look. When the show arrived at the Orpheum last November, it came refreshed and redesigned but glitzy as ever, with the chandelier swinging above and the orchestra swelling below. The national tour is now in St. Louis, with a stop in Kansas City, Mo., this December.

I brought my 7-year-old son, newly taken with the show's spookiness, and my 77-year-old father, and saw how this one show stretched so seamlessly across generations.

The boat appeared again – this time framed by the Orpheum's vast stage rather than a candlelit basement. I giggled. And once more, I began to tear up.

Midway through the performance, the audience was treated to a peek behind the mask of live theater. Right at the climax, just after the Phantom's most villainous act, Christine and the Phantom descended once more to the underground lake. Their gondola sailed offstage – and then everything stopped.

The music cut. The lights came up. There was an announcement about technical difficulties. For one quiet moment, we weren't sure whether the Phantom was up to something even more sinister than usual.

The show resumed, of course. No real opera ghost here. But this pause, I thought, is why people keep coming back – and is also, perhaps, how murmurs of an opera ghost first spread in those grand Parisian halls. In the theater, anything can happen.

TRAVEL TIPS

'Below Deck Mediterranean' star Sandy Yawn offers cruise tips

MINNEAPOLIS — Capt. Sandy Yawn has calmly handled sea storms, demanding clients and lovesick crew members. But during a Feb. 17 phone interview from Florida, the star of Bravo's "Below Deck Mediterranean" almost lost her cool because a neighbor was blasting his leaf blower.

"What is he doing?" she said, straining to hear over the racket next door so she could discuss her upcoming appearance at the Minneapolis Home + Garden Show.

Yawn, who just turned 61, did manage to retain her composure, just like she has during her nine seasons on the "Below Deck" spinoff, beloved for both its soap opera squabbles and its picturesque ports.

Yawn is prepared to share behind-the-scenes tales, leadership tips and travel recommendations during her Feb. 28 and March 1 chats from the Fresh Ideas stage at the Minneapolis Convention Center. She offered a preview while stepping outside of a friend's house in Tampa.

Q: Considering the venue, let's start with some home and garden questions. Do you have a green thumb?

A: I grew up in a family of farmers. We always had plants and flowers. If you drove up to our house, it was like a jungle. I love vegetation. That's why I live in North Florida [Jacksonville]. South Florida is a concrete jungle.

Q: What do you bring on board to make your cabin seem more like home?

A: I don't really bring anything but my clothes. I'll have a good book to read, mostly self-help books, but you can do that electronically now. Technology has really changed travel. I like to shop when we are in port, so I try to keep my suitcases empty so I can fill them.

Q: What's the best place to go clothes shopping?

A: Italy is great, especially the Serravalle [Designer] Outlet between Milan and Genoa. Even the outside of it is really cool and you can get, like, 70 percent off. I would live in shorts and T-shirts if I could, but when you do a lot of TV appearances like I do, you have to have a variety of nice outfits.

Q: What's an underrated cruise destination?

A: The East Coast of the United States is beautiful, the Hamptons, Martha's Vineyard, Cape Cod, Maine. I wish we could do a TV season there. I really like Newport, R.I. It's got a great vibe. There's a lot to do, and it's so close to everything.

Q: What's on your personal wish list of places to visit?

A: I actually have never been to Alaska, even though it's surrounded by water [on three sides]. I'd like to go check it out on land and then take a gay cruise.

Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of charting a super yacht like you ones you helm as opposed to booking travel on a cruise liner?

A: On those big ships, you get all the amenities and all these restaurants. But you have to go where they want to go. On a charter boat, you get to have your own itinerary.

Q: What advice do you have for people who are looking at chartering a yacht trip for the first time?

A: Really check out the crew online. They're going to make or break your experience. Read all the reviews. You can be on a mediocre boat, but if the crew is great, you'll have a great time.

Q: And what should they look for in a captain? What makes you good at your job?

A: I've been doing this a long time. I've never been an alarmist. I know when something happens that there's always a solution. Sometimes it's not a great solution, but you just have to keep calm.

Q: What would surprise fans about you, maybe a side of you they don't see on screen?

A: I'm pretty transparent on the show. I don't act like I'm someone else. But people may be surprised that I'm playful. I'm a jokester. I like to have fun.

By Neal Justin / The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)